

ROMANS OVERVIEW

I. Purpose, Theme, and Authorship of Romans

- A. Purpose – Encourage both Jews and Gentiles in the Church at Rome to be faithful and obedient.
- B. Theme – God reveals and imparts His righteousness through the gospel to them that have faith.
- C. Authorship – The apostle Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, through the hand of Tertius. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth in approximately A.D. 57 or 58.

II. Divisions of the book of Romans

Chapter 1 – 1) Introduction, 2) The gospel and righteousness, 3) God's wrath for the unrighteous Gentile.

Chapter 2 – 1) God's reward and punishment given impartially, 2) Jews proven to be unrighteous.

Chapter 3 – 1) Guilt and accountability of both Jews and Greeks, 2) Justification by faith for both Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 4 – Faith has always been the only means of justification.

Chapter 5 – 1) Exultation in God as a result of our reconciliation, 2) Death through Adam, but life through Christ.

Chapter 6 – 1) Faith and immersion – dead to sin, alive to God, 2) Practical and practicing righteousness

Chapter 7 – 1) The Christian has died to the Law, 2) Sin uses the Law to kill, 3) The means by which sin uses the Law to deceive and kill

Chapter 8 – 1) The Spirit gives life, 2) Hopeful Sons of God, 3) Conquering in Christ.

Chapter 9 – 1) Paul's concern for physical Israel, 2) God's sovereign plan, 3) God's wrath and mercy, 4) Righteousness by faith.

Chapter 10 – 1) Jesus is Lord, 2) Faith comes from hearing the Word.

Chapter 11 – 1) The condition of Israel, 2) Ingrafting of the Gentiles, 3) God's mercy to all.

Chapter 12 – 1) Service and attitude toward God, 2) Service and attitude toward fellow Christians, 3) Service and attitude toward all men

Chapter 13 – 1) Subjection to the governing authorities, 2) Love and light

Chapter 14 – 1) Liberty in Opinions, 2) Edification

Chapter 15 – 1) Strength to build, 2) Service to Gentiles

Chapter 16 – 1) Greetings, 2) Conclusion

ROMANS CHAPTER 1:1-15

(Introduction)

1:1 – “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,” – Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was raised strictly according to the law under Gamaliel. His zeal and understanding of the Old Testament is unquestioned both from his writings as well as from his pedigree – see Galatians 1:13-14, and Philippians 3:5-6. Here Paul describes himself as a bond-servant (douloj) of Christ Jesus. While some translations render this word to be “slave,” the context of Christianity makes this word mean so much more. He certainly is a slave of Christ Jesus, but he is a voluntary and willing slave. He patterns himself after the Servant named in Isaiah (Jesus Christ Himself). Paul refers to himself as a servant of Christ Jesus; there is emphasis upon both the fact that Jesus is our Savior (Matthew 1:21) as well as the fact that He is King (the anointed One). Paul also lets us know that he was called as an apostle (apostoloj – one sent out or commissioned). Paul was not simply an apostle of a church, although he and Barnabas were both apostles of the congregation at Antioch – Acts 13:1-3, 14:14. Paul was called as an apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles; yes, he was even called from his mother’s womb – Galatians 1:15-17. What were the requirements for an apostle? They had to be eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry beginning with His immersion and ending with His ascension – Acts 1:21-22. Paul got to see Christ’s physical and heavenly ministry by means of revelation – Galatians 1 and 2, Acts 26:16-18, 1 Corinthians 11:23. As an apostle, Paul was set apart for the gospel of God. He clearly understood that his purpose was to proclaim the good news.

1:2 – “which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,” – Paul obviously expects Christians to see the Old and New Testaments as bound together in one complete unit. *The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed or the Old is by the New explained, the New is in the Old contained.* The O.T., through the inspired writers, most certainly promised the gospel ahead of time. The promised Holy Spirit of the New Testament is the mystery of the Old Testament and is to be available to both Jews and Gentiles – Galatians 3:7-9.

1:3,4 – “concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 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,” – Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity; He is God. This Son became flesh and took on the form of man. According to the flesh, Jesus was of the seed of David. He was from the tribe of Judah, from which the kings were taken. His ancestry matched up with the words of the prophets concerning the Messiah who was to come. Paul, a natural-born Benjamite who was a slave to sin, but became a bond-servant of God due to his adoption as a son, contrasts his position to that held by Jesus. Jesus was the eternal son who came as a bond-servant to free those who were in bondage to sin. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was God’s declaration to us that Christ is the eternal Son. At Jesus’ immersion in the Jordan, God let John the Immerser know that Jesus was His Son. At the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were told by God that Jesus was His Son. But it was at Jesus’

resurrection from the dead that God's voice thundered to all mankind throughout history, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee" – Acts 13:32-33, Hebrews 1:3-5, 5:5-6. We know that the Holy Spirit was dwelling in Christ while He was in the flesh, but the full work of the Spirit in Christ could not be accomplished until His ascension – Acts 2:33. Now that Spirit of holiness can be sent to both Jew and Gentile who are obedient to the gospel. Both the imparting of life (to the Church) and the renewing of life (here in the resurrection) are attributed to the Holy Spirit. Jesus is described as God's Son and our Lord. He is our Savior as well as our Sovereign.

1:5 – “through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,” – Paul was specially appointed by Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:15-18, 22:21). Along with the responsibility was the grace or gift to empower him for his mission. The purpose of Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles was to bring about the *obedience of faith*. One of the main points of Romans is that true obedience can only come through faith. On the flip side of the coin, true faith always results in obedience. Faith and obedience are inseparably linked. While Paul in practice always gave an opportunity to those of Israelite heritage to respond to the gospel, his specially appointed mission was to reach the Gentiles. The glory of this great work was to go to Jesus Christ Himself who, through His death and resurrection, made it possible for the Gentiles to be a part of God's chosen body.

1:6 – “among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ” – Paul now turns his attention specifically to those whom he is addressing. The church in Rome consisted largely of Gentiles. These Gentiles are now part of those whom Jesus Christ has called and chosen (Matthew 22:1-14).

1:7 – “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.” – All Christians regardless of background are truly beloved of God (I John 3:1). As a matter of fact, God has loved us for eternity; thus His plan to bring us back into fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8). Note that we are not called to be saints, but that we are actually called as saints now. When we enter into covenant with Christ, we are now set apart for holy service. Christians truly are the “elect,” and the “chosen race.” The grace that is given to us through Jesus Christ brings great peace. We have been completely forgiven and we also have been empowered to overcome any temptations that Satan may throw our way. What an awesome, indescribable gift from God (His great plan) and Christ (whose sacrifice made it possible)!

1:8 – “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” – Paul was truly thankful to God; he had a real friendship relationship with God. Note the personal emphasis on *my God*. Paul was thankful to God through Jesus Christ for it was only by Christ that he had a two-way relationship with Yahweh. Prior to Paul's conversion, he had thought that he was serving God, but it was only through Christ that God even acknowledged his prayers. Paul was appreciative that the good news of their faith was going throughout the whole

world. Rome really was the “capital of the world” in that day. So many people were influenced directly or indirectly by Rome. Paul is grateful that there was an antidote to the paganism that was generally spread from Rome. Now true faith was going forth from this same place. Paul was thankful for the whole congregation in Rome, even for those whom he had not met. Here he acknowledges that the local congregation is a team in spreading the good news. The body is only as strong as its weakest link. Certainly an individual can be effective in evangelism, but to have this kind of impact requires unity of the whole congregation.

1:9,10 – “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, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.” – Paul appeals to the omniscient God as his witness that he prays earnestly for the Romans. It is easy to say that you pray for someone, but God truly knows that it is so. This only true God is the One whom Paul serves in his spirit. In other words, his inner man serves the Lord. From the subconscious out; yes, from his heart, Paul is devoted to sacrifice for his God. This devotion has to do with the good news of Jesus. Certainly it includes preaching the good news as well as living it in his life. Paul communicates his undying devotion to them in his prayers. He makes request that perhaps he will get to reach Rome in his travels. His longing to see them is underscored by the words *at last*. He also demonstrates his Christ-like attitude in that he subjects himself to the sovereign will of God. This attitude is commanded by James, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.”

1:11,12 – “For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 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.” – Paul expresses the reason behind his great longing to visit Christ’s church at Rome. He wants to impart some spiritual gift that they may be established. Is Paul speaking here of gifts of the spirit that were only available through the laying on of hands by an apostle? (See Acts 8:16-18) It seems probable, for even though Paul had previously had close association with many of those who were in the congregation at Rome, no apostle had ever been there. Therefore, Paul would have a great concern to give them the spiritual gifts necessary to build them up so they could be as complete as was possible before the completion and distribution of the entire New Testament (Contrast with 1 Corinthians 1:4-7). Paul intended for them to receive great encouragement from the spiritual gifts that he could give them. In turn, he was looking forward to receiving mutual encouragement from them as he got to interact with them and see their faith firsthand.

1:13 – “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.” – Paul wished to bring to the attention of the Romans that his longing to see them was not limited to mere words. These were his brothers in Christ and, as such, he had a special affinity for them. Paul had indeed made great efforts to get to Rome but for some reason had been unable to make the trip. We can see the fire that Paul personally had for the souls of men and

women everywhere. He wasn't content to rest simply on the fact that there were Christians in Rome. He knew that he was commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles and he desired to have a first-hand, direct experience with saving souls in Rome.

1:14,15 – “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” – Paul wasn't just a little motivated to save sinners, rather, he was under compulsion – I Corinthians 9:16-23. Every individual soul held equal value in the eyes of Paul, a man who patterned himself after our Lord. Both those who were regarded as well-educated as well as the lower class, Paul felt a very intense desire to preach the gospel to them. Notice that Paul is not speaking here about being a “pulpit preacher.” He is talking about the real work of spreading the gospel – taking the gospel to the lost on their turf. Not only was Paul under obligation to do this as a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, but he was also eager to do it. He had moved from the “got to” to the “get to.” This is the attitude that each individual Christian needs to obtain as we look in the mirror (God's Word). We each are under obligation to preach the gospel to sinners. Are we *eager* to do so?

ROMANS 1:16-17

(The gospel and righteousness)

1:16 – “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.” – Paul was not hesitant to preach the gospel to anyone. He was not afraid of the “Greek” nor the “wise,” in other words, the well-educated. Paul never shirked in shame of the good news, for he understood that everybody needed it. Even in the midst of the Roman Empire that boasted in its military power, Paul was excited to bring the gospel because of its far exceeding power. Compared with God’s power, any earthly power is weak indeed. Armies of this world destroy, while the gospel saves and renews. Think of an example of God’s power displayed in the physical realm – lightning. Paul Tuck and I spent an evening together at a wilderness survival camp with the lightning striking all around us – Psalm 97:4. How close to God we felt and how awestruck by His power. However, even the visible power of God that we behold in the universe is not worthy to be compared with the power unleashed to save a soul for eternity. The power of the good news of Jesus Christ is able to bring salvation, not a mere physical deliverance, but an eternal spiritual deliverance. What exactly is this good news? I Corinthians 15:1-5 communicates that the gospel includes 1) Christ’s death for our sins, 2) His burial, 3) His resurrection, and 4) His appearance. This salvation of which Paul speaks both rescues us from the negative impacts of sin as well as placing us in a positive relationship with our heavenly Father. Prior to obedience to the gospel, we had to face guilt, slavery, punishment, and eternal death. After we have received, believed, and obeyed the good news, we get to enjoy righteousness, freedom, peace, and eternal life. The term salvation really has to do with delivering us from the most imposing darkness and placing us in the most marvelous light. The gospel is not selective in its power. It is just as powerful to the black woman of the jungles of Africa as it is to the white man of upper class America. Nationality, gender, social status, and education have no bearing whatsoever upon the power of the gospel. However, there is one qualification for the power of the gospel to be unleashed – it is for everyone who *believes*. What does it mean to believe? Hebrews 11:1 tells us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Belief really means to take the picture that God has given us through His word and to hold to it in the midst of an unbelieving world. Faith is to believe what God has said concerning His Son as well as His words concerning us as His sons and daughters. The power of salvation was first available to the Jew and then to the Greek. During the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was given a picture of God’s plan for salvation; they were God’s chosen people. The Gentile was largely left in ignorance until the coming of Christ. Even with Christ’s ministry on earth, the Gentile was still excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. After Christ’s ascension to glory, the indwelling Spirit was sent to the Christian and the Gentiles now had opportunity to be saved by faith. However, even under the New Covenant, the natural order of those taking the message was to the Jew first since he had prior knowledge of the true God. But things have changed. The Jews largely rejected the good news, and the message abounded among the Gentiles (Greeks and those influenced by Greek culture). God’s plan that all the nations would be blessed has now reached its point of fulfillment. The only condition placed on the power is that of faith on behalf of the hearer.

1:17 – “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.’” – It is in the gospel that God’s very character, His righteousness, is revealed. Prior to the coming of Christ, the clearest picture of God was still very foggy to say the least. God’s revelation to man began with the prophecies of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. However, even those who penned those prophetic words did not really understand them – 1 Peter 1:10-12. The next step of the gospel came with the incarnation of the Word. Jesus took on flesh and blood as God came down to our level. We got the opportunity to see God’s character revealed in a fleshly body. How great and loving Yahweh is to stoop down to this earth and show Himself at a level that any accountable human being can understand. Next, came the further revelation of God and His righteousness as illustrated on the cross of Christ. God’s love and holiness met at the cross and both were completely satisfied. (We will discuss this in more detail in chapter 3 of Romans). The bodily resurrection of Christ was the next step in raising our understanding of who God really is. The same body that went in to the tomb was proven to be alive after the tomb. The nail scars and the hole in the side where the Roman soldier pierced our Lord were readily demonstrated to the apostle Thomas as well as to many others. Yet this body was decidedly different in that it now could pass through closed doors and could be unrecognizable to a couple of disciples traveling to Emmaus. Human souls were lifted beyond the mere physical that we might begin to understand that there is certainty of our own resurrection. The final revelation of God to us comes in the ascension of Jesus Christ to His throne of glory. It is Christ in glory who is the illustration of God’s full character. It is Christ on the throne who is the “radiance of His [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature...” (Hebrews 1:3). The picture of our Lord dwelling in unapproachable light communicates to us the essence of our heavenly Father. For the purpose of raising the understanding of man that we might comprehend the thoughts and character of God, the gospel has been made known to us through Jesus Christ. This revelation is from faith to faith; it is one picture given by God placed upon another until we can truly behold God’s face. Paul then quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 to establish that his presentation of the gospel is consistent with the message of the Old Testament. This message came from God to Habakkuk in answer to some questions that the prophet had posed to Yahweh. Habakkuk wanted to know why the wicked were allowed to oppress the righteous. God said that the wicked of Judah would be punished by the Chaldeans. Then Habakkuk wants to know how that can be when the Chaldeans are even more wicked than the nation of Judah. God’s answer is basically that the Chaldeans will be punished also, in fact, all sinners will be punished but the righteous shall live by faith. The Lord doesn’t merely tell the prophet that he must live by his faith, but He supplies the picture of deliverance in which Habakkuk is to believe. Even so it is under the New Covenant; we must exercise faith towards that complete picture presented to us by means of the gospel. God is always the One who does the work of salvation, but we must believe in that which He performs. This belief will be communicated through our obedience to the picture that God has placed before us (Note the record of the faithful in Hebrews 11 – they were all obedient in fulfilling that which was planted as an image by God).

ROMANS 1:18-32

(God's wrath for the unrighteous Gentile)

1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” – Here the apostle begins to show why there is such a need for the powerful saving gospel. He first turns His attention to the Gentile who is in desperate need of salvation. It seems apparent from the following context of this chapter as well as chapters 2 and 3 that Paul's main direction here is toward the Gentile. In chapter 2 he turns his attention particularly to the Jew and in chapter 3, verse 9, he makes it clear that he has been speaking altogether of both Gentiles and Jews. Also it seems that in the following verses of chapter 1, he speaks of those who have received a general revelation of God (the Gentiles), not a specific revelation (as the Jew had). God's wrath refers to His thoughtful vengeance, not a sudden outburst of anger. This wrath is revealed or made known to man through God's action. In the past, He had shown to the Gentile His righteous indignation in the flood of Noah's day, in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the plagues of Egypt. God continues to show His ongoing judgment to both individuals and nations through the seven bowls of wrath (Revelation 16). This wrath has its origin in heaven itself as this is where our sovereign God has His dwelling place. The manifestation of God's judgment is upon ungodliness and unrighteousness. It is upon those who refuse to acknowledge and honor God Himself as well as those who reject His standard. At some point, those who wish to continue in their sin make efforts to suppress the truth. Throughout the Scriptures we have examples of those who wish to “silence the messenger,” such as Jezebel with Elijah, Zedekiah and his officials with Jeremiah, and Herod with John the Immerser. In recent history, we see those great proponents of Darwinism and humanism (such as the Huxley brothers) who suppress the truth in order that they can feel better about their godless lifestyles. There are those powerful men and women of our present establishment who have chosen to rewrite history for the same reasons. One of the best ways to suppress truth is to develop an “alternative explanation.” As Lenin once stated, “Fiction repeated often enough becomes fact in the public eye.” Cecil Rhodes, Karl Marx, David Rockefeller, J.F.K., Bill Clinton, George Bush (take your pick) and other world-changers intentionally suppress the truth to further their unrighteous agendas. But do those who are ignorant of Jesus Christ, specifically the Gentiles before Christ, really have enough knowledge of the truth to be guilty of suppressing it?

1:19 – “because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” – Even apart from the special revelation of God to mankind through His word, God has still made Himself known in general terms to every accountable person. God has disclosed Himself through history, through the individual conscience, and through nature. God governs the whole universe with both physical and spiritual laws. This logical pattern of cause and effect in the physical realm, of actions and consequences in the spiritual realm, leads every honest individual to the recognition of a Master Designer. When we examine history truthfully, we cannot be content with an accidental view. We see the conspiracies of men driven by an unseen evil plotter, the great deceiver of old. We view a compassionate influence that intercedes for the good of humans, yet an uncompromising power that allows societies to be raised up or cast down

based upon their submission to the Author of history. When we honestly investigate the inner workings of every individual, particularly myself, we are forced to the conclusion that there is right and wrong, good and evil. Any person who pursues this thought comes to the understanding of the Moral Lawgiver. If we pause to reflect on nature, that is the creation, we recognize that there is such a thing as natural law. In the words of Albert Einstein, "I defend the Good God against the idea of a continual game of dice." Particularly in this passage of Romans, there is emphasis upon the revelation of God through His creation. God designed this universe with the exact intention and purpose of making Himself known to His greatest creature, the one made in His image and likeness. The point made here by the Holy Spirit is that those who refuse to acknowledge God do not do so for "lack of evidence" (quote from Bertrand Russell), but because they have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness because of their unrighteousness.

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." – Again Paul is emphasizing that even apart from the divine revelation of the gospel, man is without excuse if he does not know that there is One True God. God's invisible qualities have been clearly portrayed since the creation of the world. Many times people ask you how you can believe in something or Someone that you cannot see. Although God certainly is invisible to fleshly man, the effects of this unseen God should not go unnoticed. We don't have to see the wind to realize that there is such a thing because we can view the effects of the wind. Although we may have never met the contractor who built our house, we still have 100% confidence that there has existed such a being. God's eternal power is easily recognizable to the truth-seeker. As stated earlier, this power is readily available to our understanding if we examine history. But simply from the creation we should recognize that the One who made the sun, moon, stars, multiple galaxies, mountains, rivers and oceans, the water cycle, and the miracle of the living cell has eternal power. God's divine nature is also clearly revealed; the source of wisdom and goodness is seen in the workings of the physical universe (see Matthew 5:45, Acts 14:16-17). Even before our advanced technology that tells us even more how much we don't understand about the miracle of the creation, man was able to reflect on the vastness of the universe. Those attributes of God that are invisible to the human eye are clearly seen by the soul of man. God has made it clear that there is no excuse for any fully developed human being to avoid knowing that He exists.

1:21 – "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." – This verse is just a further explanation of verse 18 and 20. Those who reject the evidence that God has left concerning Himself, suppress the truth. These people refuse to honor God or give thanks for all the blessings He has bestowed. It is easy to see this in the big proponents of evolution or humanism. But if we look a little closer, this is true of every individual who attempts to dispute the fact that there is a God. Instead of praising God for all the benefits that He gives them, they become futile in their speculations. These ungodly people carry on a dialog with themselves. They begin to come up with illogical arguments and speculation to try to make a case that there might

not be a God. As they continue to reason on their own apart from examining the evidence of the creation, their foolish hearts are darkened. This darkness points toward mental laziness, emotional despair, and total depravity. This heart that becomes dark is the center of a man's existence – Proverbs 4:23. It is the source of a person's thoughts, words, and deeds. The heart is the seat of the emotions, will, and intellect. When one's heart is darkened, feelings will be confused, thoughts will be crooked, words will be destructive, and actions will be detrimental.

1:22-23 – “Professing to be wise, they became fools, 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.” – What a great difference between what people perceive to be real and what really is! What a huge chasm between the claims of empty talkers and the truth! Yet those whose hearts and minds inexcusably have been blinded to the truth always profess to be wise. In the past these people have attempted to make a tower that will reach into heaven. They have hired a goldsmith to make an idol and then they fall down and worship it. They have traded the real glory of the incorruptible God for various images. The image of man is listed first for the only enduring religion besides worship of the true God is worship of man. This is visible in statues that attempt to replicate the image of Jesus or Mary. Another angle of human worship is portrayed in the Humanist Manifesto of our day. This is equivalent to the religion that Adam and Eve accepted from Satan in the Garden of Eden. The basis of the “Enlightenment” is that man can save himself. Ongoing trust in a government who “will protect us and ensure our safety” is another version of this image of corruptible man. Idol worship of various animals and creatures has been displayed through the fish god of the Philistines, the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, the eagle of the Roman Empire, etc. Mankind trades that which is truly glorious for an empty shell. The well-educated of today have traded a faith in God for a theory that we came from eternal matter with chimpanzees being our closest ancestor. These men and women are self-proclaimed “wise ones” but have proven themselves to be the worst fools.

1:24 – “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” – There is always a close tie between idolatry and immorality. From the orgy of the Israelites with the golden calf of Aaron's day and the Baal and the Ashtoreth of the Gentiles to the blatant immorality of America whose icons include Britney Spears and Kobe Bryant, there always has been a connection. The logical outcome of Darwinism (the standard for idolatry among the “wise”) is for humans to have animal desires. God, in His infinite wisdom, gives humans over to this impurity. He uses His judgment in a two-fold manner. The hope is that man will learn from the emptiness of idolatrous pursuits and repent and live. But there also is the fact that justice must be served. Those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways receive the just “fill of their ways.” While the final outpouring of God's wrath is awaiting Christ's return in judgment, God's wrath is presently revealed in the punishment of the wicked in this life. This punishment takes many forms including the mental anguish of guilt and bodily sickness and disease that is a direct result of sin.

1:25 – “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.” – Verse 25 is an elaboration of verses 21-23. Those who profess to be wise are more than ready to trade the truth of God for a lie. We see that worship and service of the Creator is described as the truth while idol worship is participation in the lie. Those Gentiles who revere and offer sacrifice to idols deserve the punishment of verse 24. Paul ends this verse with proper exaltation of the Creator. He is so far superior to false gods that have been created by the art of man. The true God is certainly worthy of eternal blessing. Amen.

1:26-27 – “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 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.” – Because people have traded the truth of God for a lie, God gives them over to degrading passions. Here Paul turns his attention specifically to the perverted outgrowth of immorality – homosexuality. God clearly condemns homosexuality in the New Testament just as surely as He did in the Old Testament – see Leviticus 20:13 as an example. Here homosexuality is described as unnatural. The obvious purpose of the sexual act between husband and wife is to bring forth offspring. Participation in intimate physical relations between members of the same gender is totally contrary to the natural purpose of reproduction. Also note that the Scripture condemns homosexual practice because it is a degrading passion. The God-ordained practice of sexual intimacy between husband and wife builds up the psyche of both partners. Homosexual activity is degrading; it is a gross practice that lowers a person beneath the level of an animal. This wicked practice results in various health problems because of its degrading nature. The mental anguish of a guilty conscience is manifested in violence, emotional stress, and despair. These spiritual problems often lead to physical problems as well – Psalm 32:3-4. This is in direct contrast to what takes place when we trust in the Lord with all our heart – Proverbs 3:5-8. One major modern disease that has its roots in homosexuality is HIV/AIDS. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:7-8)

1:28 – “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,” – Again there is shown to be a direct correlation between man’s rejection of God and God’s rejection of man. In three different ways in this section of Scripture, the Holy Spirit communicates that man’s problems come as a result of his refusal to honor God. Instead of treasuring the knowledge of God that is available through the general revelation of creation, mankind decides that it is not worthwhile to acknowledge God. So humans continue on in their unrighteous way adding one sin upon another and driving themselves even further away from the only Source of Life and Truth. As it has been for the Gentiles of old, so it is now in the United States of America in our postmodern thought which completely rejects the revelation of God through His creation and His word.

1:29-31 – “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;” – This list of sinful thoughts and actions is similar to many other lists which contain various fleshly habits. Here the apostle Paul breaks these down into three groups: 1) group of four sins beginning with “being filled with,” 2) group of five vices introduced by “full of,” and 3) group of twelve items beginning with “gossips.” *GROUP OF FOUR* – Unrighteousness has to do with a refusal to live in accordance with the standard set by God through His laws. Wickedness describes people who delight in doing wrong. Greed is covetousness and lust for more possessions. Evil is a deeper, entrenched form of wickedness. *GROUP OF FIVE* – Envy is displeasure toward another person because they have something that you want. Murder is the intentional killing of another. This usually arises from envy or harboring angry thoughts. Strife refers to a quarrelsome attitude. Deceit is dishonesty and cunning. Malice communicates the desire to harm someone. *GROUP OF TWELVE* – Gossips are those who secretly or quietly spread stories about a person; the book of Proverbs often refers to such people as “whisperers.” Slanderers are those who openly accuse a person hoping to destroy reputations. What gossips do in secret, slanderers do in full view. Haters of God are those who have turned against God to the point of hatred. Insolent individuals treat others with contempt; they look down on others. Arrogance is an attitude of self-exaltation. Boastful characters brag about their arrogance. Inventors of evil are those who are not content to follow in the sins of others, but must concoct a special means of carrying out an evil scheme. Disobedient to parents are those who refuse to be in subjection to those whom God has rightfully placed as authority in the family. This includes the rebellious, those who would curse their parents, and those who refuse to honor their father or mother (monetary ramifications). People who are without understanding are those who have chosen to be stupid because they have always been unwilling to listen to God. Untrustworthy individuals are not true to their word. Unloving people are those without natural affection. Consider those who abort their own babies as an example of this group. Unmerciful persons are cruel and ruthless. This would include those who inflict harm on others as well as those who are unwilling to help the harmed.

1:32 – “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.” – The Holy Spirit makes it clear that perpetrators of the evil things listed in the previous verses are not innocent creatures who can’t understand the difference between right and wrong. Every adult individual knows that those who practice such things are worthy of death. How do they know this? According to the context, God continues to reveal Himself through nature and in the conscience of every individual. In one sense, there will be no surprises on judgment day, for those who do these evil things know that they deserve death and that one day the Creator of the universe will hold them accountable for such unrighteous behavior. However, they continue to practice evil and then applaud others who do the same. This approval of others’ misdeeds demonstrates how far such a person has gone in suppressing the truth. God has established that the Gentile’s wickedness is so great that he deserves the

judgment of God. Thus, man cannot save himself. It is going to take divine intervention from God to bring about any rescue.

ROMANS 2:1-16

(God's reward and punishment given impartially)

2:1 – “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.” – Having established that the Gentiles were lost and in need of the gospel, the apostle Paul now goes to work on the Jews. The majority of Israelites had themselves fallen into pagan idolatry along with the nations. Only a remnant had come through the captivity and dispersion. Since it has already been established that the evil practices of the Gentiles are an abomination to God, now it is pointed out that everyone is without excuse when they practice the same things that are so easy to condemn in others. Paul here makes the same point that Jesus makes in Matthew 7:1-4. Man's judgment is generally biased while the judgment of God is completely impartial, as we shall see in the verses to come.

2:2 – “And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.” – “We know” – who is this we of whom Paul speaks? He is directing this part of his teaching to the self-righteous Jew. God is not interested in someone merely knowing the law or possessing the awareness of the difference between right and wrong. God is interested in performance; He requires that people do what He commands. (One of the interesting sidenotes here is that law *cannot* produce righteous performance; thus a need for faith). A human measuring stick for behavior is always flawed. It has a tendency to judge others harshly while giving a favorable reading to the individual holding it. Human judgments don't really count, but the judgment of God most certainly does.

2:3 – “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?” – Every honest person realizes that to some degree he has practiced those things that he condemns as wrong. For every individual, honest and dishonest, there is a judgment day. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Nobody, not even the self-righteous Jew, can escape this judgment.

2:4 – “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” – The Jew had a tendency to feel a false sense of security with God upon two grounds. First, he thought that since he had possession of the Law, that he was safe. Secondly, he thought that since God had continued to be patient and kind with the nation of Israel throughout the centuries, that this certainly showed that he was in good standing with God. Previously Paul quickly destroyed the first argument showing that performance and not possession was God's basis for judgment. Now, Paul destroys the second argument. He shows that the whole purpose of God's kindness to the Jews was not so that they could feel good about their present standing, but so that they might turn from their flawed way of thinking and adopt God's viewpoint.

2:5-8 – “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, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.” – Contrary to the deluded Jews’ thoughts of security, Paul now sets forth the impending doom for these recalcitrant Jews. Although God’s wrath may not as yet have been poured out upon the Jews as it had upon the nations, God makes it clear that it is coming. The hard-hearted Jew was storing up wrath for himself because of his stubbornness. The final outpouring of this wrath will take place on judgment day at the return of Jesus Christ. Granted, the physical nation of Israel would shortly be judged in the physical realm by the Romans in 70 A.D. However, the judgment of every individual will take place at the revelation of the righteous judgment of God on that great and glorious and terrifying final day. This judgment will be rendered to each individual for his *deeds*. Note the emphasis of the book of Romans on salvation for those who believe, but also on the deeds of every individual. In other words, there is not a contradiction between faith and deeds; rather, the only way to maintain righteous behavior is by faith. This righteous behavior cannot be accomplished by works of the Law (which many confuse with deeds), but only by faith. The faithful are those who persevere in doing good. They persevere by holding on to their faith picture, in other words by seeking for glory and honor and immortality – Note Hebrews 11:6. Such persons who are faithful unto death receive the crown of eternal life. However, those who do not have faith are described here as selfishly ambitious. They have traded the faith picture as given in the Scriptures for a self-centered dream. In doing so, they refuse to obey the truth and practice unrighteousness instead. At some point, selfishness requires a person to reject the truth. These people get exactly what they deserve, wrath and indignation. Eternity in hell is not bellying up to the bar with Satan as the bartender, instead it is a place where all of God’s displeasure is unleashed. It is a place of lonely torment wherein a person cannot escape God’s wrath. The point that Paul makes in this passage is that it is not only the Gentile that has rejected the truth, but so has the selfishly ambitious Jew.

2:9-11 – “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” It is not what a person imagines himself to be, but what he does that determines his acquittal or conviction on the day of judgment. Many people confuse faith with imagination and law with deeds. Actually we can see from the context that the opposite is true. It is those who live by law that attempt to justify themselves while condemning others; these people are self-deceived. The law cannot produce deeds that are truly righteous, but it can produce an imaginary security. On the other hand, faith is not simply that I imagine myself to be okay; therefore, I am okay. Rather, faith is truly believing what God has said concerning us as sons of God. This real belief produces within us the righteous character of our Heavenly Father so that our actions are consistent with what is expected from children of God. In the end there will be great outward affliction upon evil-doers as well as internal distress. Hell is not going to be a

comfortable place no matter how you look at it. On the other hand, heaven is going to be a place of glory and honor and peace. Full peace will be realized as we encounter immortal fellowship with our God. In the case of punishment for evildoers and reward for those who do good, both will be meted out impartially. It doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Greek, there will be no favoritism. Judgment and reward will be given based on performance. (As a side note, we live in an increasingly socialistic society, where anybody who has a standard, including God, is accused of partiality. In other words, people expected to be treated the same as everyone else without any reflection on performance. If a person is rewarded for their hard work, or someone is punished for laziness or some other crime, our world cries out, "That's not fair." Nothing could be further from the truth! The doublespeak of our postmodern culture has redefined favoritism as exactly opposite of what it really means. True impartiality is when rewards and punishment are given based on performance, not pressure to make everyone feel good.)

2:12-13 – “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; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.” – This is a clarification and further explanation of what Paul has been discussing. Punishment will be rendered based on the actions of an individual in regards to the requirement of the Law. Just because the Gentile hasn't been given the written Law doesn't mean that he will avoid judgment. The Gentile who has broken the Law cannot plead ignorance. He will perish for his sins, for infringing what he knows to be right. In the same way, just because the Jew knows the Law doesn't mean that he will escape punishment. All who have sinned under the Law will be judged in accordance with the Law. There is a great distinction between those who hear and those who do. (Notice that even under the law of liberty, we are not to be merely hearers but doers.)

2:14-15 – “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, 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,” – Again, we see that the Gentiles are not excused because they were not given a written law directly revealed from God. Every single individual has been created in God's image and has been stamped internally with God's moral law. This natural law gives a person the ability to accuse or defend himself in his own mind. Certainly the conscience has limits and can be seared by a person over time. However, the reason that it resides within us is so that we can make honest assessments of our performance apart from the written Law. The conscience can both accuse and defend, so even the Gentile cannot avoid responsibility for his sin.

2:16 – “on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.” – This concluding statement seems to relate to all of Paul's main points in this section. It is important to note that the preaching of the gospel includes the judgment of God through Jesus Christ. Also, notice the point that it is only through Jesus that God will judge the secrets of men's hearts. Paul is subtly building to the point of justification through faith in Christ as he shows that Jesus is the final judge.

ROMANS 2:17-29

(Jews proven to be unrighteous)

2:17-20 – “But if you bear the name ‘Jew’ and rely upon the Law and boast in God, and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,” – The Jews most certainly had been given great advantages over all the nations in that they had received the written Word of God. The proper attitude would have been to realize that “to whom much has been given, much shall be required.” The Jews should have been looking for opportunity to employ their gifts in helping others. Instead they merely bragged about their status. In bearing the name “Jew,” they bragged about being God’s chosen race (which was certainly true in the Old Testament). However, they put confidence in themselves rather than in God – see Matthew 3:7-10. In reference to reliance upon the Law, they didn’t delight in God’s Law as David did. Instead they boasted in the mere possession of it – note John 5:39-47. When the Jews boasted in God, it was not in the sense in which the apostle Paul boasted in the Lord. They were arrogant about their relationship to God as if they had earned it (see John 8:37-42), when in reality, the only reasons that they were chosen by God was because of the faith of Abraham and God’s mercy. Having been instructed out of the Law, the Jew should know God’s will and be able to approve the things that are essential. He should be able to differentiate between the things that really matter and irrelevant information. This Jew who had been thus instructed from the Law was confident that he was: 1) a guide for the blind, 2) a light to those in the darkness, 3) a corrector of the foolish, and 4) a teacher of the immature. Now, people who are physically without sight are totally dependant upon their guide. Remember at Montana Youth Camp in 2002, we were blindfolded and had a guide. Following the guide requires total faith in the person that is leading. Jesus warned about blind guides of the blind – one of the boys at camp. Paul clearly implies that a guide for the blind had better be completely reliable. The Jew also was convinced that he was a light to those in darkness. God’s plan as given in the Old Testament was clear that even the nations were to be exposed to His glorious light – see Genesis 22:18, Malachi 1:11, Isaiah 42:6. We know that this did not reach its fulfillment until the coming of the Holy Spirit, but the Jew did somewhat see himself as God’s light in a dark world. The Jew also was sure that he had been endowed with much knowledge and that he could teach the foolish and ignorant. He was confident that because of his knowledge of the Law from childhood, he could certainly teach the immature – Gentiles or new converts. Yet in all of this, it seems as if Paul is taunting the Jews a little to get them to examine themselves.

2:21-23 – “you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?” – There is an old saying that “those who can’t play, coach” or maybe “those who can’t do, teach.” However, the Scripture has always been clear that if you are going to teach others, you had better live accordingly. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the

greatest teacher ever because His life was the perfect display of His teaching – see 1 John 1:1-3. Jesus taught that the teacher had a high level of accountability – Luke 6:39-40. James 3:1 tells us that teachers will have a stricter judgment. Here the Holy Spirit through Paul makes the same point. If you are going to attempt to keep others in line, you had better be walking the straight and narrow yourself. You need to be squared away yourself before you get bent out of shape concerning someone else. Paul refers to three of the Ten Commandments to make his point. Stealing, adultery, and idols were all condemned under the Law. However, if you are going to hold others to the standard of the Law, you had better be guilt-free in regard to these sins. For many people, there is a huge discrepancy between their theology and their practice. To obtain acceptance by the Law requires perfect obedience to the Law, which cannot be accomplished through law. The end result of Law is hypocrisy, and God is dishonored.

2:24 – “For ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ just as it is written.” – This quotation is taken from Isaiah 52:5, wherein the name of God was blasphemed because of the captivity of Jerusalem. The Gentiles believed that when a nation was conquered, its god was conquered also – see Exodus 32:11-14 and Ezekiel 36:16-28. Although God allowed Israel and Judah to be enslaved because of their sin, His name was dragged through the mud as a result of that sin. Paul points out that in the same way God is mocked when His followers act wickedly. Jesus once pointed out, “...everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” – John 8:34. Thus if God’s people continue to practice differently than they preach, the Gentiles will continue to believe that God is inferior to the god of this world.

2:25-27 – “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. So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 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?” – The apostle Paul has already established that the Jew cannot have confidence based on his bearing the name of “Jew” nor on his mere possession of the Law. Every single Jew who had reached an accountable age had not been able to keep that law. If his physical heritage weren’t enough, he now would attempt to put his trust in his physical mark of circumcision. Paul soundly thrashes the Jew holding this false confidence. He makes the point that circumcision is of no value without obedience to the whole Law – see Galatians 5:3. If a Gentile were able through his conscience to keep the requirements of the Law, that obedience would be counted as circumcision. As a matter of fact, he would even judge the Jew who had the letter of the law but refused to obey it in full. Recall what Jesus told the Jews of his day concerning the Gentiles of Ninevah and the Queen of Sheba – see Matthew 12:41-42. When it comes to right standing with God, the externals of circumcision are irrelevant (the purpose of circumcision will be discussed at great length later in chapters 3 and 4). No matter what the outward physical efforts exerted by man, he cannot meet God’s righteous standard. Paul is building toward a restatement of the theme of Romans – the only way man can be right with God is by true faith.

2:28-29 – “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 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.” – Again Paul emphasizes the point that neither physical descent nor a physical mark makes a person a true “Jew.” The term Jew was derived from “Judah” which literally means “praised” – see Genesis 29:35,49:8. Any physical descendants of Abraham could praise themselves, but only the spiritual descendant of Abraham would be praised by God. Under the New Covenant during which Paul writes, a true “Jew” is he who is one inwardly – one who has had a circumcision of the heart. This circumcision only takes place in immersion – see Colossians 2:11-12, Galatians 3:26-29. Nearly the whole religious world tries to make immersion a “work” and relate it to physical circumcision. However, the Scripture clearly teaches that immersion is the spiritual circumcision of the heart performed by the hands of God. Surely the act of immersion apart from faith is simply a dead work, but the Scriptural “obedience from the heart” in immersion is where our faith meets God’s great work. It is herein where the Spirit of God is granted and continual renewal of the heart can take place – see Ezekiel 36:26-27, Titus 3:5. Note that confidence before God can only come by being a true Jew, that is, a spiritual one.

ROMANS 3:1-20

(Guilt and accountability of both Jews and Greeks)

3:1 – “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?”

– Paul is a master at understanding the possible objections of his listeners and answering those objections at the appropriate time. It is very probable that the hearer, upon now understanding that being a Jew inwardly is what really counts, would begin to ponder. He may begin to wonder if there is any advantage whatsoever in belonging to the Jewish nation. Paul’s answer comes in verse 2.

3:2 – “Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

– It is no small privilege to have received from the Heavenly Father a special revelation. The Israelite nation had been given not only the Law, but also the divine writings of the prophets. Commandments had been clearly laid out, establishing the absolute holy standard of God. Prophecies had been given of the coming Christ. What an awesome foundation! Who could underestimate the honor of receiving such a precious communication from the true God?

3:3-4 – “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 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.”

– There is no doubt that the nation of Israel had been blessed with many advantages. However, those advantages did not guarantee a positive end. We see this everyday in the physical realm. Many a person who has born into a wealthy family and given all the best opportunities to further himself has ended up a loser. Each individual must decide to make the best of what they have been given or else they will have no promising future. In the same way, the nation of Israel could not look forward to a great hope because, by and large, she had squandered that which God had given her. Of course not all of physical Israel were in this dark state. There were some individuals who had been faithful with what God had given them. However, the ones who were unfaithful are not a reflection of God. God has always been faithful to carry out His promised blessings and curses. God’s Word cannot be broken; God cannot lie; He is perfectly faithful – see John 10:35, Titus 1:2, and 2 Timothy 2:11-13. Human unbelief does not nullify God’s faithfulness. Rather, it makes God’s righteous and faithful character stand out all the more. The apostle Paul quotes David out of Psalm 51:4. In David’s prayer of confession and request for forgiveness, he makes a sharp contrast between his grievous sin of adultery and murder and God’s everlasting righteousness. David acknowledged that his sin was only against the One God who renders true judgment. Again we see that a person’s unbelief and disobedience don’t nullify God’s faithfulness, instead, God’s righteousness clearly triumphs.

3:5-6 – “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.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? –

It is clear that God’s perfect righteousness stands out in the midst of human shortcomings

and wickedness. Thus, man poses the question, “If my unrighteousness makes clear God’s righteousness, shouldn’t God be happy about that?” This is a real question that comes up in the minds of most people. As a matter of fact, it is asked in a different manner in the next couple of verses, and once again revisited in chapter 6. From a human perspective of self-justification, it seems that since God can turn the practice of evil to a favorable result, then He shouldn’t be so hard on the practice of sin. The self-justification continues: maybe God isn’t fair when He inflicts wrath (punishment) on man for his impure deeds. Paul’s basic answer is that of course He who is qualified to judge the world is fair. As Abraham appeals to God’s impartiality in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

3:7-8 – “But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 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.” – Again God’s righteousness is called into question by an objection. At an individual level, if God can cause His truth to shine through my lie, why am I judged as a sinner? Now God has always been able to work His plan through those who do evil as well as those who do good. As an example, think of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. On the night of the crucifixion, Judas was the most important apostle. Yet in no way was the sin of Judas justifiable. In Christ’s own words, “It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” The sovereignty of God does not contradict His righteousness and His justice. The second objection of this verse exposes the faulty reasoning of modern-day Calvinist thought. Mankind comes up with some very fantastic attempts to justify ongoing sin. The argument basically asks why we shouldn’t go on sinning and let God turn it to good (this should bring to mind Romans 6:1). At Montana Family Camp, I took a physical jab at Evan Brady. When he started to fight back, I reminded him that Jesus said he should turn the other cheek. The implication was that I was God’s agent to test Evan. In a very similar tactic, people endorse a complicated and subtle twist of Scripture to justify unrighteous behavior. Paul doesn’t really even bother to answer this perversion. He simply maintains that those who hold to this doctrine deserve the condemnation that they will receive.

3:9 – “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;” – Who is the “we” of which Paul speaks? Is Paul speaking of the “we” as himself as a Christian as he seems to in verse 8? Or does the “we” refer to the Jews, as it seems to earlier in verse 6? The context of verse 9 as well as the overall context of this passage indicates that he is speaking of the Jews. It has already been stated in this chapter that there certainly was an advantage in that day to having been raised with the oracles of God and having received circumcision. Paul has even gone forth to show that when the majority of the nation of Judah had gone astray, God had even used their disobedience to bring about His glory. The next logical question now comes about, “Although we’ve seen from chapters 1 and 2 that both Gentiles and Jews have broken God’s law, since the citizens of the nation of Judah have been given some advantages, does that mean the Jews are better than the Gentiles?” Paul’s response is adamant that the Jews are not a superior people. He

counters with what he has already established – both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. He now turns to some Old Testament passages to confirm this fact.

3:10-12 – “as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.’” – It is obvious that Paul’s argument of the first few chapters has come to its climax. Sin is universal in its nature and impact upon the human race. In the words of one preacher, “...sin is a deeply entrenched enemy. Having entered the world through the disobedience of Adam, sin has since been burrowing into the depths of the human heart, setting up battlements and defenses, so that, once dug in, no amount of human goodness can root it from the hole of its darkened headquarters. From its hide-out sin wields the wrecking bar, destroying relationships between man and man, and throws the cleaver which splits asunder the God-ordained union of man and wife. Out of the blackened fastnesses of unregenerate hearts flows rapacious greed, the love of money being a major "root of all sorts of evil" (I Timothy 6:10), including the production and distribution of the drugs which are destroying modern society. From the walled-in fortresses of sin-twisted human hearts ooze the evil thoughts which produce life-destroying pornography, the drive for power which ruthlessly plots wars and rips civilization to enslave others, and the pride and foolishness which plunge men and women into the declivity of eternal ruin. Sin chortled mercilessly in the blackened hollow of Adam’s heart as it forced him who had been in Eden to clean up the remains of his son Abel, and witness the banishment of his older son, the murderer Cain. Sin is the bane, the destruction of the human race.” (Jay Wilson, *Cleansing the Inside of the Cup*, 11th Hour Press, page 89)

The apostle Paul here makes the same point as he makes it clear that there is no exception to those who are under the influence of sin. Next he turns to some specific sins of which the race of mankind is guilty.

3:13-14 – “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,’ ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness’;” – Notice that the Holy Spirit presents the sin of the tongue as proof of the universal nature of sin. Most other sins hold different groups of people captive, but the sin of the mouth at some point ensnares everyone – Note James 3:1-12, Matthew 12:33-37, Matthew 15:15-20. Paul quotes from Psalm 5:9 when he describes the throat as an open grave that is ready to devour its victims. Deception is something that also passes through the medium of the tongue. Underneath the lips of a viper are the fangs that are filled with poison – from Psalm 140:3. In the same manner, the human being poisons others through cruel or untrue words. Finally, Paul quotes Psalm 10:7 as he points out the cursing and bitterness that proceed from a person’s mouth – again note James 3:8-12. The sins of the tongue spread poison, which in turn negatively impact others as well as the one committing the sin. How destructive the sin and how universal!

3:15-18 – “Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’” – After focusing his attention on the sins of the tongue, Paul now turns to the sinful actions of mankind. Remember that Jesus twice makes the point that “a tree is known by its fruit.” Once He says this in reference to words, and the other time He relates its meaning to a person’s deeds. Ongoing wars throughout the world validate the words of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 59:7-8 – people’s lust for blood and destruction. Instead of peace, there is continual misery. The cause of this continual waywardness is given in Psalm 36:1 – there is no fear of God. The Gentiles have chosen not to

acknowledge God and the Jews have chosen not to fear Him. The result is the same – a world that is mired in sin.

3:19 – “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;” – It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul has been quoting from the Psalms and the Prophets and the Writings (Ecclesiastes), yet categorizes all of this under the terminology of the “Law.” There are some who maintain that when the Scripture speaks of the Law, it only refers to the Ten Commandments or to the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible), which is the actual meaning of “the Law” in the strictest sense. However, the New Testament often refers to the whole Old Testament as the Law – see John 10:34, John 15:25, I Corinthians 14:21. In understanding what Paul means when he speaks of “those who are under the Law,” we must realize that he is summing up all of his arguments of the first few chapters. Every single individual, if allowed to live to a mature age, at some point comes under the jurisdiction of the Law. Whether Jew or Gentile, every person is called to account by the Great Lawgiver. Of all who stand before the Judge, every mouth is closed without exception. The Law has fulfilled its duty – by it, all men are shut up under sin.

3:20 – “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” – Paul closes out this section with an irrefutable argument. No person, by the works of the Law, can ever be justified in the sight of God. Why is this impossible? Let us quickly review the requirements of the Law. The Law demanded that a person love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that he love his neighbor as himself – see Luke 10:25-28. At the core, this love is what both Gentile and Jew were lacking. In the book of Romans, the Gentile has been charged as refusing to “give thanks” (1:21) and was also categorized as “unloving” (1:31). The Jew was condemned for his “stubbornness and unrepentant heart” (2:5) and for his “selfish ambition” (2:8). Paul has already made clear that every person has received a guilty verdict in God’s courtroom of Law – see verse 19 above. The only possible conclusion that can be reached is that each individual as well as the whole of mankind is doomed. The Law, with its requirement of moral and spiritual perfection, which no person can attain by his own power, simply creates in the person an acute awareness of his shortcomings and guilt. Where is the hope? It is most certainly not found under any law.

ROMANS 3:21-31

(Justification by faith for both Jews and Gentiles)

3:21 – “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,” – As we have already seen, the primary thrust of the Law was not to reveal the righteousness of God, but instead it was to expose the unrighteousness of man. God’s righteousness has been made known through the gospel and apart from the Law. Thus the theme of the book of Romans as given in chapter 1:16-17 is again encountered. God’s plan to make Himself fully known to man through the gospel of Christ was implemented at the fullness of time – Galatians 4:4-5. However let us be sure to understand that this was the same plan that God was working in the Old Testament. It was not complete under the Old Covenant, nor was it ever intended to be made complete under that system. Yet it was most certainly foretold through the Law and the Prophets. Our awesome and righteous God is the Great Architect and Builder who painstakingly developed and presented His blueprints in the Old Testament and now under the New Covenant has unveiled His masterpiece construction. The prophets prophesied of this time so marvelous that angels have longed to see it – 1 Peter 1:10-12, Matthew 13:17. The Law did not and could not make God’s complete righteousness known, but it was necessary foundational information in order for man to be able to comprehend God’s full revelation.

3:22-23 – “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” – We see that God’s righteousness is only revealed through a mechanism called faith. The faith picture given to us under the New Covenant is the picture of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not administered based upon heritage, education, social standing, wealth, or nationality; no, it is made known to all who exercise faith. God makes no distinction in this revelation; the Law has made it clear that no person can achieve God’s glory on his own. Hence the only requirement for beholding God’s righteousness is to truly believe God.

3:24 – “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;” – In line with the rest of Scripture as well as what we have already encountered in Romans, it is safe to say that Paul is not implying here that all who have sinned will be justified. One time Jerod Schaefer and I studied with a couple of his contacts that were convinced that in the end everyone would be saved; I can’t remember if there was also hope for the devil or not. However, this is completely contrary to the teaching of the Scripture. The point that Paul is making here is that the only means of justification is by exercising faith in Christ. The part where Paul makes it clear that there is no distinction is a parenthetical statement establishing that there is no other way to be justified. When we speak then of justification for Christians, what do we mean? To justify literally means to declare righteous. For the Christian to be declared righteous by God, a trade had to take place. All of our sins were placed on Christ on the cross, and Christ’s righteousness was credited to us – 2 Corinthians 5:21. This justification was granted to us as a gift by Christ. In other words, there is no payment made by the receiver. As has already been established in Romans, no person could meet the standard

of God's righteousness so justification would have to be given freely by God. The grace of God literally has to do with the gifts that He bestows upon us. All of this was accomplished through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Redemption means that a ransom payment was made to deliver us from the guilt, punishment, and power of sin. Praise God for His willingness to offer up His Son on our behalf. Thanks be to Christ for buying our salvation with the price of His physical life on the cross!

3:25-26 – “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; 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.” -- There is no doubt that the crucifixion of Christ was a very public event. God chose the Passover holiday of the Jews as the perfect timing of Christ's execution by the Roman soldiers. Christ was crucified just outside Jerusalem so that all who were entering the city for Passover would be aware of the event – Hebrews 13:12, John 19:20. Adding to the publicity of this event, Pilate had put above Jesus' head an inscription saying that He was the King of the Jews. So well-known was Christ's death on the cross, that the two men who met Jesus on the Emmaus road were convinced that everyone visiting Jerusalem was aware of what had taken place – Luke 24:18. Ten to thirteen years following Christ's ascension, the apostle Peter is sure that Cornelius, a Roman centurion, knew of Christ's ministry and death. Some thirty years after the death of Christ, the apostle Paul refers to the public familiarity with this event in his defense before King Agrippa – Acts 26:26. After clearly prophesying of the crucifixion in the Old Testament, God openly displayed the shedding of Christ's blood so that all may know of the redemption that is found in Jesus. When the Holy Spirit here describes this event, He speaks of the propitiatory covering of Christ's blood. Many times this is translated the “mercy seat” in the New American Standard version. The idea of a propitiatory covering was first laid out in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would take the blood of the sin offering and sprinkle it on the mercy seat wherein God accepted it as a substitution for the life of the sinner. God would then turn His wrath away from the persons who were covered by this sacrifice. When Christ came as the true propitiatory covering, God's plan reached His completion. The sacrifice of the Son of Man was of equal value with the price of the sinner's life. This sacrifice was willingly offered by Christ, was accepted as a substitution by God, and can be accepted as a substitution by any person in the world – see 1 John 1:2. Again we see that the one requirement by God for this propitiation to be efficacious is the faith of the individual. Where there is faith, there is no wrath of God. We see that God executed this plan through Christ to prove His righteousness. It may be asked whether God was fair when He overlooked the sins of the faithful under the Old Covenant. The point here made is that Christ's blood atoned for all the sins of the faithful, both Old Covenant and New – see Hebrews 9:15. God is not unjust; the sins of all humanity were placed upon Christ on the cross. The Just God most certainly has the authority and the power to justify those who have faith in Jesus. As clearly expressed in Rotherham's translation, “That he might be righteous even when declaring righteous him that hath faith in Jesus.”

3:27 – “Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.” – After establishing that it was only by the gift of God that we have the opportunity to be justified, Paul communicates that there is no place for boasting – see also Ephesians 2:8,9. This exclusion of boasting has not happened on the basis of works. On the contrary, a law-based system of works produces pride and boasting. However, the law of faith produces true humility and leaves no room for arrogance. Also note here the terminology inspired by the Holy Spirit – a “*law of faith.*” Faith has boundaries defined by the Word of God; faith is neither a free-for-all nor a blind leap. Rather, faith is a clearly defined picture that has been painted by God in the Scriptures.

3:28 – “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” – The undisputable record is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Thus the Holy Spirit, through Paul, has already made it clear that no person could ever be justified by works of the Law. The corollary has also now been set forth: a man is justified by faith. It may well be noted that if a person cannot be fully justified by works of the law, then it is futile to attempt to be partially justified by those works. Now we come to a bit of a thorny question. When Martin Luther was studying through the book of Romans, he well understood that this verse (3:28) freed him from the chains of legalistic Catholicism. However, as often happens with reactionary people, he exceeded what is here written. In his translation of the New Testament, Luther added the word “*alone*” to this verse, saying that a person is justified by faith alone. By adding this word to the Scriptures, Luther contradicted what was written in James 2:24. Rather than rethinking his position on Romans, Luther refused to recognize the authority of the letter of James, disputing its place in the canon and declaring it to be a “book of straw.” Obviously, Luther’s solution was wrong; no person has the authority to cast aside part of the Bible because they don’t agree with it or don’t understand it. It is important to note that the Protestant Reformation and most of so-called evangelicals today hold to Luther’s basic position, maintaining that a man is justified by “*faith alone.*” Whenever there is such a widespread lie, it is worthwhile to dig until we understand the truth. In such cases the truth, whatever it may be, always has an incredible bearing upon our overall understanding of God’s good news. Just this one misinterpretation forces people to reject the Scriptures about immersion for forgiveness of sins as well as leaving a thick fog about God’s plan for righteousness in His people. Let us then attempt to come to a reasonable understanding of Romans 3:28 in reference to James 2:24. First, let us return to the fact that Paul’s point in context is that a person can never be justified by attempting to perform the works of the Law. These attempts at fulfilling the Law by means of law have never been able to accomplish the desired end. Thus Paul maintains that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. From what Paul has already established on into what he will continue to convey throughout the book of Romans, there is sufficient evidence from the Old Testament to make his case. Now, let us shift to the context of James chapter 2. There James calls into question a person who “*says he has faith, but he has no works*” – James 2:14. Nowhere does James mention “works of the Law.” James instead communicates that *professed faith* is no faith at all (the Scriptural word that he uses is “dead”) if there is no action as a result of that faith. James also quotes from the Old Testament in reference to Abraham showing that Abraham’s faith

was demonstrated in his offering of Isaac on the altar. Abraham was not attempting to fulfill some work of the Law in this sacrifice; rather, this obedience was an overflow of his faith. The writer of Hebrews points out that it was *by faith* that Abraham made this offering – Hebrews 11:17. The Holy Spirit further describes in that chapter of Hebrews that Abraham’s faith really was in God’s ability to raise the dead. There is an obvious connection throughout Hebrews 11 and the whole of Scripture between faith and obedient action. Paul himself clearly brings this out in his letter to the Galatians. Paul hammers away at the Christians of Galatia that a person cannot be justified by law. Yet in his contrast of the Law with faith, he plainly states, “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” – Galatians 5:6. Thus, we find that there is no contradiction at all between Paul and James. Paul here emphasizes that *the Law cannot produce righteousness*, while James strongly says that *a claim of faith without righteous behavior is not real faith*. With proper understanding, we see that, while approaching this issue from opposite ends, both Paul and James arrive at the same conclusion: “*the righteous man shall live by faith*” – Romans 1:17. Think about the key concepts brought to light in this statement – 1) God’s righteousness is demonstrated in man, 2) this man performs righteous action – he lives, and 3) all of this is brought about by faith. Not only is faith the only means by which a person can be righteous, but also true faith always produces righteous behavior.

3:29-30 – “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.” – If righteousness was imparted through the Law, then it could be maintained that God is the God of Jews only. However, when God’s righteousness was fully revealed through the good news of Christ, God’s plan for salvation of the Gentiles was also explained. It is really wonderful that in this manner the Oneness of God is brought forth. There is only one true God; the Israelites of old knew this fact, but had never thought Him to be the God of the nations also. However, the fruition of God’s preparation was for the barrier between Jew and Gentile to be removed through Christ. God certainly places emphasis upon the number one – there is only one God and only one way of salvation – see Ephesians 4:4-6.

3:31 – “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” – It is possible that some may still misunderstand the meaning of Paul’s previous dissertation in the book of Romans. Some might mistakenly (and lazily, I might add) think that Paul has been saying that by our faith the Law is abolished. Paul says that this is absolutely false. Rather, the exact opposite is true; we establish the Law through faith. (In other words, if you have arrived at the conclusion that there is no need for the Law and that the Law has no significance for the Christian, then you had better go back and study what Paul has written). We find this very similar terminology to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17; what Jesus accomplished in His physical body, He continues to fulfill in His spiritual body of the faithful. Let us briefly summarize the main points that Paul has made concerning the Law and faith. 1) The Law demonstrates the unrighteousness of man. Therefore, the Law has a place in pointing out to the non-Christian his sinful separation from God. 2) The Law attested to the manifestation of God’s righteousness by faith. The prophecy and foreshadow of the Old

Testament point to the fulfillment of God's plan under the New Testament. These things were written for the instruction of the Christian so that he can behold God's working from beginning to end. 3) The righteous requirement of the Law is met by the Christian, not by means of the Law, but by faith. God's standard is not swept under the carpet; rather, it is clearly portrayed in the faithful Christian. Hence, the faith that we hold under the New Testament does not nullify the Law; it establishes the Law.

RO MANS CHAPTER 4:1-25

(Faith has always been the only means of justification)

4:1 – “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?” – To the Jew, who prided himself in the lineage and circumcision of Abraham, it was astonishing to have the oneness of God expressed in terms of God of the Gentile as well as the Jew. In order to establish this point for the Jew, Paul turns back to Abraham, their forefather according to the flesh. He asks the question, “What has Abraham found?” Paul will show us that Abe found the *righteousness of God!* The Jew, under the assumption that Abraham had earned his good standing with God, put great stock in his fleshly father, Abraham. Paul is going to backtrack and determine exactly how Abraham found God’s righteousness. By now it shouldn’t surprise us that he found this awesome treasure by faith and not by works.

4:2 – “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” – Again we need to understand that many of those of the physical lineage of Abraham would resist Paul at the issue of justification. They had deeply ingrained the idea that God chose Abraham because of his good works. Thus, they thought that Abraham stood before God on his own merits. Earlier, in chapter 3, Paul had posited the statement that by the law of faith boasting is excluded. Now it is true that if Abraham was justified by works, there would be room for boasting before men, but still not before God who is the standard of righteousness. As we shall soon see, there was certainly no room for boasting before God, because the Scripture makes it clear that Abraham’s righteousness wasn’t earned but was credited by God.

4:3-5 – “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,” -- Note that righteousness was not credited to Abraham as a result of his works but, rather because of his faith. In a quotation from Genesis 15:6, Abraham’s faith is first described here as, “Abraham believed God.” It is very important for us to understand that Abraham not only believed *in* God, but *believed God*. In other words, whatever God said and however He chose to say it, Abraham believed. It was this unshakeable faith that was “reckoned” or “considered” or “credited” to Abraham as righteousness. Not one word is said in Genesis 15 about Abraham’s work or merit. If Abraham would have worked his way into proper standing with God, then his righteousness would have been earned. However, it clearly wasn’t earned, but was credited as a favor. This is a key Scriptural point – the only way a person can be declared righteous is by believing God. As a side note, see that there is a Scriptural equivalent of belief in Christ (Him who justifies the ungodly) with believing God. In other words, if a person claims to believe in Christ, then he must believe what God says in His Word. In trying to figure out the issue of justification, it seems likely that a person may again bring into question James 2:21-24. The Holy Spirit uses exact terminology when He says that Genesis 15:6 was *fulfilled* in Abraham’s sacrifice of Genesis 22. Understand that Abraham’s deeds were a fulfillment of his faith that God would carry out that which He had spoken. Abraham was not

justified by works of the law, but his faith was shown in his works (as a sidenote, James does not bring up the events of Genesis 16 – Hagar and Ishmael – to demonstrate Abraham’s faith). Notice that righteous behavior follows faith, and cannot be accomplished apart from faith.

4:6-8 – “just as David speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘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 easily moves from the example of Abraham and now turns his attention to David, another highly regarded figure of the Israelite nation. David, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke in Psalm 32 of the truly happy or blessed man. This happiness would not come about because of the man’s great works, but because of God crediting righteousness to him apart from works. Just as it was a certain blessing that faith was “reckoned” or “credited” to Abraham, so David speaks of the blessing that something (sin) will not be “reckoned” or “taken into account.” It is very important for us to understand the implication of the words “reckoned” or “credited” or “account” in this passage of Scripture. Let us use the illustration that readily presents itself in the early part of this chapter – monetary accounting. First, we go back to the discussion of work and wages used by Paul in verse 4. In simple terms, a person trades units of labor for previously agreed upon units of wages. In other words, whether a person has agreed to \$30/hour for his work, or a denarius for the day, or some other specific sum for the completion of a job, on payday he is recompensed for that which he has done. For the purposes of illustration, this individual logs every hour worked into an “accounts receivable” ledger. In the meantime, this same individual is logging all expenses incurred into the “accounts payable” section of his book. A simple economic lesson is: “You had better spend less than you make.” When we apply this to the spiritual realm, we find that on the basis of works every person comes up short, for the books clearly show a debt that no person has the means to repay – Romans 6:23, Matthew 18:23-25. Attempts at salvation by works end up becoming futile attempts at self-justification; there is no means available to the person to honestly “justify” or balance the books. Considering the huge debt that could never be repaid (eternal death), how happy is the man who sees that the King will justify his books for him by forgiving him all his debt – Matthew 18:26-27. Please remember from what has been covered in chapter 3 that the King has not forfeited His justice – there is One who had the means to repay and He willingly paid the debt for us. This great gift is freely given to those who “believe God” or “believe in Him who justifies the ungodly.” Let us joyfully thank the Lord for His great blessings.

4:9-12 – “Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.’ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 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, and the father of the 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 here explains that this awesome blessing of justification was not intended only for Abraham and David. The typical Israelite would expect that this blessing might be extended to others who are circumcised, but definitely not to those uncircumcised Gentiles. Think of the raging debate in the first-century church regarding whether or not circumcision was required for Gentiles to be saved. So, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul masterfully answers his own question: “is this blessing then upon the circumcised or the uncircumcised also?” He turns to the example of Abraham, father of the Israelite nation, to skillfully present his case. The next burning question is: when was Abraham justified, “while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?” Paul then proves that Abraham’s faith was credited as righteousness before he was ever circumcised. It is very clear from Genesis chapters 15-17 that it was at least fourteen years (and possibly much longer) from the time of God’s blessing upon Abraham until the point of his circumcision. Thus we can draw the conclusion that circumcision has nothing to do with being declared righteous. As a matter of fact, the inspired apostle Paul further explains that circumcision was a sign – a seal of the righteousness that Abraham had while uncircumcised. As a sidenote, many false teachers today claim that what circumcision was under the Old Covenant, immersion is under the New Covenant. However, that cannot be proved from Scripture. On the contrary, as previously discussed at the end of Romans chapter 2, the New Testament makes it very clear that immersion is a spiritual circumcision wherein we believe that God performs His miraculous work – see Colossians 2:12. Immersion is not to be written off as an *outward sign of an inward grace* that has no relevance to salvation because the Bible instead equates it with circumcision of the heart which has everything to do with salvation. If there is anything that is a seal of a Christian’s covenant with God, it is the Holy Spirit – see Ephesians 1:13-14. However, we will wait until later to discuss the Spirit in detail. The main point that the apostle Paul makes here is that Abraham’s faith was acknowledged by God well before he received the sign of circumcision. It is then clear that Abraham is the father of two groups: 1) the faithful who have not been circumcised, and 2) the faithful among the circumcised. The definitive word is not circumcision, but faith. Thus, we understand that the barrier between Jew and Gentile has been abolished (see Ephesians 2:11-18), for Abraham is the spiritual patriarch of the faithful regardless of their physical lineage.

4:13-15 – “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. 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.” – Paul continues to demonstrate that while justification by faith is only fully realized under the New Testament, the foundation was laid under the Old Testament. In developing this theme, he also brings up the fact that the full benefits of God’s message were based on a divine promise (That this promise to Abraham is the Holy Spirit is made clear by other passages – see Galatians 3:14, Ephesians 1:13-14). The Jews figured that the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled by obedience to the Mosaic Law. However, Paul shows from the Old Testament that the inheritance of promise couldn’t be based on Law, for the Law was not even in effect yet – see also Galatians 3:16-18. It is important to understand that the promise made to Abraham was twofold in its nature. First of all,

Abraham was promised that he would be given a great land. Secondly, he was promised that his seed would be very numerous and that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. The New Testament strongly asserts that while both aspects of this promise had physical ramifications, they were intended to be fulfilled in the spiritual realm. Thus it is that Hebrews 11 speaks of fulfillment in the Church when it describes the promised land as “a heavenly city, whose architect and builder is God.” Galatians 3 clearly brings out that the promise to the seed that all the families of the earth would be blessed was fulfilled in Christ coming as the Holy Spirit to indwell both Jew and Gentile Christians. So when Romans 4:13 makes the claim that the promise to Abraham or to his descendants would be *heir of the world*, we understand that this is fulfilled in the Church in the spiritual realm. While many continue to have their hope fixed on an earthly utopia, whether present or future, the Christian understands that the kingdom of Christ (the Church) is everything. I Corinthians 3:21 succinctly states, “Let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you.” Again the point of emphasis is that this promise is granted on the basis of faith, not law. If it was ever granted by law, then there would be no need for faith, and the promise would not be in effect. The Law could not produce righteousness, so all it could do was produce wrath. However, since the promise was made in the absence of law, then the transgression of that law was impossible to be consciously committed. In other words, God gave the promise in such a manner that there was freedom for it to achieve its purpose.

4:16-17 – “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, (as it is written, ‘A father of many nations have I 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.” – Paul now points out that the promise being administered by faith is in line with grace. In other words, God offers the gift of the promise to those who exercise faith. If the promise could have been granted by means of a person’s fulfillment of the Law, there would be no need for grace. When we understand that the promise is a gift of God, it makes sense that it will be guaranteed to all the faithful descendants, for the fulfillment of God’s plan is in His hands and not dependent upon man. Through the promised Holy Spirit, Abraham is the father of the faithful, both those with the background of the Law as well as the Gentiles – see Galatians 3:26-29. We see that the word of God which Abraham believed thus bringing about his justification is now fulfilled: “A father of *many nations* have I made you.” The apostle Paul brings our attention back to the One who made and executed such a promise of blessing to Abraham. God is here described as 1) He who gives life to the dead, and 2) He who calls into being that which does not exist. The first description certainly makes reference to God’s miraculous revival of Abraham and Sarah so that they could bear children well beyond the age of natural ability. However, it also applies to the resurrection of Christ from the dead as well as the resurrection of Christians in immersion today and the future resurrection of the body. The second description seems to refer to God’s power displayed at the physical creation and again manifested in the miraculous existence of the nation of Israel through Isaac. Once again we see spiritual application when a person is born again as a “new creation.” Note that all of God’s power is released

through His words. This power is then available to everyone who will really believe that which He has spoken.

4:18-22 – “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 descendents be.’ 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; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.” –

For Abraham to become a father of many nations, he first had to become the father of Isaac, the child of promise. In reference to this fact, Abraham’s faith is described as a belief “in hope against hope.” In other words, Abraham believed in spite of impossible odds. At the age of Abraham and Sarah, there could be no human expectation that a son would be born, so this hope was in the supernatural. As a result of Abraham’s faith that God would fulfill His promise, Isaac was born, and hence, Abraham became a “father of many nations.” It is very important to understand that Abraham’s faith rested on the spoken word of God. True faith is not some sort of wishful thinking, or a wouldn’t-it-be-nice scenario. True faith is absolute conviction that what God has said He will do. Such faith is required for anyone who will be justified in Christ – see Romans 1:16-17. It is also interesting to note that faith does not mean checking your brains at the door. Living under the banner of “intellectualism,” the popular viewpoint of today is that faith and reason do not fit together. Thus, if a person desires to be religious, he must segregate his faith from his reason. However, the inspired account of Abraham shows us that nothing could be further from the truth. Without becoming weak in faith, Abraham “contemplated” the circumstances which enveloped him. In other words, there is no conflict between thinking and faith. On the contrary, in order to arrive at true faith, it is demanded that a person reason – see Isaiah 1:18. Here we see that Abraham thought about it and concluded that God would have to perform a miracle to accomplish His word. Upon examination of Genesis 17, we see that Abraham discussed God’s promise with Him and even suggested that Ishmael might please God as Abraham’s heir. However, when God made it clear that His promise would be fulfilled through Isaac, a son not yet born, Abraham had no doubts. After his discussion with God, his faith was strengthened and he gave glory to God. At a personal level, we need to understand that legitimate questions are not synonymous with doubt; instead we find that faith can only be nurtured through honest questioning and meditation. Another case in point again involves Abraham’s offering up Isaac years later. Hebrews 11:19 says, “He *considered* that God is able to raise men even from the dead.” Again we see that Abraham’s faith was the *result of his thinking* and *not in spite of his thinking*. One final point to ponder from these verses – Abraham’s faith was in God’s ability, not in his own power. This is a key difference in the approach of justification by faith rather than by Law. Law always directs us back to our ability or inability, while faith puts the focus where it should be – on God and His strength. This true faith of Abraham was then credited to him as righteousness.

4:23-25 – “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” – A key Scriptural principle is here laid forth by the apostle Paul. The words written of Abraham were not solely for his benefit; no, they were for us as well. Many people believe that the Scripture can only ever have one meaning, but in cases of prophecy, there is often application in both the immediate and future sense. As a matter of fact, the New Testament gives us tremendous insight into the real purpose of God’s plan. As an example, I remember an illustration that my dad used to communicate this point. He spoke of my brother Matt’s high school graduation with reference to a Ferrari. If my dad were to offer Matt a remote-control Ferrari that they had viewed together in Wal-Mart, Matt wouldn’t be disappointed to get that remote-control car at the party and later find a real Ferrari with his name on it parked in the driveway. The greater present was the real one, of which the remote-control car was simply a symbol. In the same way, the full intent of God’s purpose is revealed in the New Testament. The faith that was reckoned to Abraham is also reckoned to us who believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Just as Abraham doggedly held to the belief that God would make him a father of many nations, so we doggedly hold to the belief that God has raised us with Christ in our immersion. The final phrase of this chapter is very controversial because of the number of ways it is possible to be translated. The Greek preposition *dia* may mean “for,” “because of,” or “on account of.” Alternate renderings include, “He who was delivered over *for* our transgressions, and was raised *for* our justification,” or “He who was delivered over *because* of our transgressions, and was raised *for* our justification.” I am inclined to agree with the last case. The primary reason for my conclusion is that the blood that justifies us was not efficacious until it was sprinkled in the heavenly realm (see notes on 3:25). In other words, the rest of Scripture bears out the fact that our justification was not complete until Christ’s resurrection and ascension. All that having been said, a fair question at the end of chapter 4 is this: “Have you found what Abraham found?”

ROMANS CHAPTER 5:1-11

(Exultation in God as a result of our justification)

5:1-2 – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” – From this point forward in the book of Romans, Paul speaks to those who have been justified by faith. All of the groundwork has been laid in the previous chapters so that there would be no misunderstanding as to the means of our justification. Now we can begin to move forward and examine some of the great blessings that accompany our justification. The first blessing that is mentioned is peace with God. To properly appreciate this peace, we must understand what it means to be at enmity with God. Prior to our justification, our sins were being held against us and it was simply a matter of time before we would partake of God’s great wrath. Certainly, we understand that there is an imminent day of judgment in which those who are enemies of God will be cast into a lake of fire. Hence, peace with God drastically changes our future eternal outlook. There is also great contentment knowing that our past sins have been forgiven. As beautifully stated in “Please Shut This Gate” by F.W. Boreham, “There are thousands of things behind me of which I have good reason to be afraid; but it is the glory of the Christian evangel that all the gates may be closed. It is grand to be able to walk in green pastures and beside still waters unafraid of anything that I have left in the perilous fields behind me.” There is likewise great pleasure in understanding that our present state is great; now good is sovereign over evil in our lives – see Romans 8:28. All the benefits of peace are available to us only through the reconciliation brought about through Christ. It is only through Christ that our faith that justifies us also gives us a formal introduction to grace. Our faith is meaningless apart from God’s grace, but God’s grace will not be granted apart from our faith in Christ. The word grace literally means “gift” and has many different uses in the New Testament. This verse of Romans paints a picture of us shaking hands with grace so that we can confidently stand before God – see Hebrews 4:16. In other words, here we could say that grace provides a comfortable working environment wherein we can be extremely motivated to give 100% to our heavenly Father. Standing in grace, we do not live in fear of making mistakes; instead, we get great on-the-job training where we learn from our mistakes. Thus, productivity continues to rise in the life of the faithful Christian who continues to grow in favor with God. As a result of our good standing with God, we get overjoyed about the coming glory of God and our own resurrection. Glory is most clearly defined by the resurrected state of Christ. Notice that we do not boast about our strength, but we do get excited about what God has in store for us. Our hope is based on a strong foundation so we can fix our hope completely on the glorious return of Jesus Christ our Lord. By faith, we are assured of this and we enjoy God’s glory now, but there is a day when faith will become sight and our bodies will be glorified with Christ. What a wonderful feeling of exultation!

5:3-5 – “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character, and proven character, hope; 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.” –

If we have such a great hope of glory, then we can truly be excited about our tribulations. Herein the road to character and love; yes, the road to glory, is laid out for us by God. The true “Roman road” shows us how to take on the very nature of our Heavenly Father. There is a chain process by which we really develop our hope as Christians. The whole process begins with suffering for the sake of Christ. The apostles rejoiced “that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame” for the name of Christ – see Acts 5:41. Do we have the same desire to be considered worthy? If so, then we do not shrink away from the first step in becoming like Christ. James exhorts us to have a great attitude when we experience trials because this tests our faith and builds endurance. It is this endurance that is essential to us becoming “perfect and complete.” According to Hebrews 12, it is through the discipline of the Lord that we get to “share His holiness.” When we suffer for doing what is right, we have to rely upon the Lord for His strength. God’s power is perfected in our weakness and when we see that power at work, our faith is strengthened. Perseverance is absolutely essential in the race of life! Life is not a sprint; it is an ultra marathon. The fight of life is not merely stepping in the ring for 90 seconds; it is a 15 round bout with 3-minute rounds. Without perseverance we lose the fight; there is no contest. Perseverance isn’t something that we are born with; it has to be developed through training. Hence we are overjoyed when the Holy Spirit is putting us through the paces of tribulation in order that we will develop the endurance to be overwhelming conquerors. The logical outcome of perseverance is proven character. Proven character means character that has been tested and sustained the test. There is no doubt that the armor of King Saul was reliable but David didn’t have personal confidence in it because he had not tested it. An athlete can *believe* his coach when he is told that he has all the ability in the world, but he *knows by experience* only after he has been tested in competition. In the words of Teddy Roosevelt, “It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.” Our Lord is interested in producing His character in His children. He knows that the only means by which this can be accomplished is through fiery testing. Just as the impurities are burnt out of gold and silver in the furnace, so our impurities are removed through the tribulations that God allows us to encounter – see Zechariah 13:9, 1 Peter 1:6-9. Once we have encountered a number of these tests with great attitudes, and built up our endurance, and established our character, then our hope of the resurrection is indeed a hope that will not disappoint. Not only do we have faith and hope, but we also have God’s love within us. Our faith has justified us, our hope has been insurmountably built, and now God’s love has been poured out into our hearts. Not only has the Righteous Judge declared us righteous because of our faith, but He has also proven His love by giving us His Spirit and adopting us as His children. It is through this process that our Heavenly Father changes us into His own image.

5:6-8 – “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 the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward

us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” – Again we see that there is no way that man could save himself. So often men in particular want to raise themselves up by their own bootstraps and prove that they can do anything by their own power. Yet when it comes to the issue of righteousness, the honest person finds that he is totally powerless to save himself. It is in the midst of this ungodly person’s helpless state that Christ died for him. While it may be rare, we have examples of people who were willing to give their lives for the sake of a worthy cause or a worthy individual. However, God’s unique love is shown by His willingness to have Christ die for us while we were in our sinful state. No merit from us could have motivated Christ to give up His life; He died for the purpose of demonstrating God’s love toward us. The old saying is certainly true – actions speak louder than words. Anyone can speak of undying love; God has shown us by example a love that is willing to die. Everything that we understand about true love comes from God’s willingness to teach us by His own actions – see 1 John 4:19. There is also a point here that should not be overlooked – true love sacrifices for the sake of the beloved – see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. It has been well said that God did not write a complicated thesis on love; He just gave the life of His Son to show us what real love is.

5:9-10 – “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 been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” – How great a work of Christ that we should be justified by His blood! There is an indescribable peace because we have been declared righteous through the blood that Jesus shed on Golgotha. In Christ’s death He freely paid the debt of our sins in order that our account may be cleared. The clean conscience that was granted us when we were immersed into Christ’s death truly brings peace to the past and present. Yet as great as this gift is, there is something greater – what the Holy Spirit describes as “much more.” There is a future eternity that we get to spend with God because of who Christ now is. In other words, Christ’s death would have been insufficient without His resurrection. The blood that dripped from Jesus’ side on the dry ground of Calvary was the necessary sacrifice for our sins. However that sacrifice still had to be offered by the High Priest in the heavenly Holy of Holies for God to turn away His wrath. The risen Christ had to sprinkle blood in the true propitiatory or “mercy seat” in heaven in order for the cleansing to be complete – see Hebrews 9:23-28. If God was willing to reconcile enemies to Himself through the death of His Son, how much more is He willing to save His friends through the intercession of the High Priest who lives forevermore. So many people mistakenly speak of the completed work of Christ on the cross. Christ’s death removed the barriers between man and God, but it is His life in glory that saves. Reconciliation (the removal of barriers) does not bring to life that which is dead. To be saved an individual has to be brought out of death into life. This is possible because we have a great High Priest who has entered into eternal life as a forerunner for us – Hebrews 6:20. The emphasis brought out in Romans is the continuing saving work that Christ accomplishes from the throne. “Much more we shall be saved through His *life*.”

5:11 – “And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” – Not only shall we be

saved in the future, but right now we exult in God! In other words, we rejoice in our Heavenly Father because of all the blessings He shares with us, both present and future. It is very important for us to remember that any boasting that we do should be done in the Lord – see 1 Corinthians 1:31. God deserves all of the glory and the credit, and all of our joy should be directed toward Him. Of course it is important that we acknowledge that our reconciliation with God is enjoyed only because of the sacrifice of Christ. Our privilege to walk and talk with God was granted us by the sacrificial love of Christ. Let us then be joyful about everything!

ROMANS CHAPTER 5:12-21
(Death through Adam, but life through Christ)

5:12 – “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 -- ” – Here the apostle Paul begins a thought which he will not return to until verse 18 where he completes his statement, “...even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” As he begins to make his point he understands some objections that may be raised and combats those arguments in verses 13-17. However, let us get back to the thought which is here introduced. The word “therefore” means that a conclusion is being drawn from the preceding statements. The overall conclusion that will be made in this passage of Scripture is that Christ not only nullifies the negative, harmful effects of sin, but also brings in something that has a positive impact on us – namely, eternal life. In order to understand the life that Christ brings, we must first recognize the significance of sin and death. Satan, the great deceiver of old, wraps his evil plans with tantalizing packaging. The wicked witch of Snow White fame was not the first to make the poisonous apple look luscious. Thus it was through the cunning of the serpent that a perfect man living in a perfect world fell into sin. Through one man, Adam, sin rushed into this world and has never relinquished its territory. For humans to fully comprehend the deceptiveness of sin, the rotting corpse of death must be viewed. In the fairy tale of Snow White, she simply passed into a deep sleep all the while maintaining her youthful beauty. In reality, Adam and Eve ate of the fruit and physical death and decay began to set in until the body returns to dust as it once was. Every time innocent blood is shed in murder, every time a body succumbs to cancer, or every time a heart stops beating in a bed, this is a result of the sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden. As horrible as physical death is, spiritual death – separation from God – is immeasurably worse. The separation of a man from his God is intensely painful, cannot be remedied by man, and is eternal in length. There is no doubt that while Adam’s sin affected the whole human race in regards to physical death, it also impacted each of us individually in reference to our spiritual death. Every one of us has been born into a world that is polluted with sin to the extent that we begin to regard depraved behavior as normal. Hence, through Adam’s sin even spiritual death spread to all men because, as the Scripture here says, “all sinned.”

5:13-14 – “for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 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.” – A possible argument arises that if sin is transgression of the Law, then how could every individual be guilty of sin in the absence of Law (or before the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai)? As was previously communicated in chapters 1 and 2, there is such a thing as natural law and individual conscience. It was because of sin that death ruled supreme from Adam until Moses. Think of the worldwide flood of Noah’s day, when virtually the whole world was put to death because of their evil ways. Now it is true that many had not disobeyed a direct command such as Adam had, but even before the Mosaic Law, there was law – see Romans 2:14-15. Now we may ask how Adam is a type of Christ. There is a similarity because Adam opened the gates of sin to all who follow after him, while Christ opened the door to righteousness to all who are His.

However, the rest of the parallel between Adam and Christ is for the purpose of contrast rather than comparison.

5:15-17 – “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. 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. 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.” – We immediately notice the contrast between Adam and Christ; “the free gift is not like the transgression.” By Adam’s trespass death entered into the world and “many” – that is, Adam’s physical descendants – died. Opposite to that, a great gift of God came through Jesus Christ to “many” – that is, Christ’s spiritual offspring. On the one hand, judgment must be rendered because Adam brought sin into the world. This judgment comes back with a verdict of “guilty” and results in condemnation for all who have sinned. However, the free gift is different. Christ brought the gift because He saw that no one could avoid this guilty verdict. This gift was the payment in full of the judgment required so that the verdict in the case of Christ’s followers is “not guilty.” However, justification through Christ does not merely negate sin and bring us back to a state of innocence. Justification has a positive impact in that it places righteousness upon the Christian. In like manner, as a direct result of Adam’s sin, death has held every individual in bondage. But through Christ, who conquered death, there is a reign of life. As we notice the obvious connection here brought forth concerning righteousness and life, it should remind us of the theme of Romans as put forth in 1:17 – “But the *righteous* man shall *live* by faith.”

5:18-19 – “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. 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.” – After digressing upon the various arguments that may arise, Paul now returns to his main point which he started to make in verse 12. Through Adam sin entered into the world and the harmful effects were spread to all because all sinned. It is not true that “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” However, Adam opened the gates of sin and every human being that has reached the age of accountability before God has followed headlong into that sin. It is as though every person is stamped with the image of Adam and therefore acts like a sinner. It is interesting that the mark of the beast in Revelation chapter 13 has the number of man – 666. When you understand that 7 is the perfect or complete number, you see that 666 is a picture of sin upon sin upon sin or failure, failure, failure. Because of Adam’s example, every individual at some point becomes a Plan A man. The obvious result of this sinner’s mindset is condemnation. However, Christ brings in through one act of righteousness a whole new mindset. There are those in Revelation 14 who, instead of the mark of the beast, have the name of the Lamb on their foreheads. These have been purchased by Christ’s act of righteousness and have replaced the image of sin with that of

righteousness. Because of the example of Christ, every Christian has now become a Plan J man. We have been made righteous and now get to experience true life as well as being assured of eternal life in the future.

5:20-21 – “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” – As was already pointed out, even in the absence of the Mosaic Law, there was still law (the natural law, law of the conscience, etc.). Here God’s purpose for bringing forth the Law on Sinai is brought out. The terminology that Paul here uses is “so that the transgression would increase.” It is clear from context as well as other Scripture passages that Paul is communicating that the Law clearly defines sin – see Galatians 3:19-24, Romans 7:13. The purpose of the Law is to lock up the individual in the jailhouse of sin, that he might understand the need to be set free. It is only through the commandment that sin is seen to be what it really is – utterly sinful. When the Law shows us the ugly death brought about by sin, it acts as a tutor to lead us to Christ. As a person understands the depth of the pit that he was in due to sin, he also has a greater recognition and appreciation of the value of Christ’s gift – see Luke 7:40-43. While sin drives a great chasm of separation between man and God, grace abounds even more wherein God builds a bridge that we may come back to Him. While sin ruled supreme in death for all people under law, God’s gift rules through righteousness for all who have faith in Jesus Christ. On the one hand of law and sin there is sure death, on the hand of grace and righteousness there is eternal life. Choose life that you may live!

The following table is a good summary of the contrast between Adam and Christ as given in Romans 5:12-21:

<u>Adam</u>	<u>Christ</u>
By one transgression, many died	By one Man grace abounded to many
Judgment arose, resulting in condemnation	Free gift arose, resulting in justification
Death reigned through Adam	Those who receive grace and righteousness reign in life
Through one transgression there resulted condemnation for all men	Through one act of righteousness there resulted justification for all men
Through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners	Through the obedience of the One the many were made righteous
Sin reigned in death	Grace reigns in righteousness

What kind of person do you want to be – a Plan A man or a Plan J man? Each of us needs to trade in the image of the earthly for that which is heavenly! Get rid of the mark of the beast and get sealed with the name of the Lamb. Roll the number 666 over into 777 and enjoy the reign of grace in righteousness all the way to eternal life!

ROMANS CHAPTER 6:1-11

(Faith and immersion – dead to sin, alive to God)

6:1-2 – “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” – As the apostle Paul goes on teaching about the fruit of our justification, he makes the connection between our legal status with God and our true condition. In the process, he continues to establish the interworking of our faith with God’s grace. As we move through chapter six, we find that God’s intention is not to save us in the midst of our sins, but to save us from our sins. In other words, the final goal is not simply to be declared righteous by God, but to be made righteous by God. However, let us arrive at that conclusion in the order in which it is proven by Paul. Having laid out the fact that a person can only be justified through God’s grace in conjunction with an individual’s faith, Paul communicated that this grace was given in response to “many transgressions” – see Romans 5:16. The end of chapter 5 reminds us that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Hence, when grace is not fully understood the natural question that arises is, “Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase?” Since the sin of the justified individual is not even taken into account, then why not sin on and let grace do its thing? This perversion of grace has been taught and practiced by many throughout the age of the Church. We know that Jude chose to write “that we contend earnestly for the faith” because some had “turned the grace of God into licentiousness.” We can see the harmful effects of Calvinism on many who in practice use their misunderstanding of grace as an excuse to go on sinning – example of “Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner.” This misconception of grace is quickly squashed as Paul’s response thunders, “May it never be!” Notice that he does not turn to law as the means of overcoming this faulty and damnable position. On the contrary, the solution is presented by means of the appropriate faith picture. We must remember that since we were introduced to grace by our faith, we should also grow in grace by faith. Paul begins to make his case by asking a question, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” The nature of death as a result of sin has already been presented in chapter 5. Both the horrible pain of physical death as well as the more intense spiritual separation from God has been dwelt upon. It has been well shown that man cannot escape physical death by his power much less rejoin himself to God. Thus it was only through grace that this death was overcome. Now the reality of death is again presented but in a different light. Just as much as the sinner is separated from God as a result of his sin, so the man who has been justified by his faith is separated from sin as a result of the grace of God. The justified individual has indeed died to sin. Herein the practical question arises – “How?” How can a person stop the practice of sinning? It should not surprise us that the answer has everything to do with the faith picture given to the New Testament believer.

6:3-4 – “Or do you not know that all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through immersion 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.” – The Creator’s answer to our question of overcoming sin comes at a person’s immersion into Christ. If words mean anything, then immersion in water is where God acts, not merely a

symbol of something that has already taken place. It is only *in Christ* that a person gets all the spiritual blessings of being a new creature. The most important question that a person can ask is how to get into Christ. It is clearly stated here in verse three that a person is “*immersed into Christ.*” When an individual is immersed into Christ, he is immersed into Christ’s death. We know that Jesus died for everyone, but the only people who are saved are those that contact Christ in His death. It is in immersion that the old man is nailed to the cross with Christ. It is in immersion that the blood which was shed on the cross is sprinkled on the heart of the repentant person thereby granting a clean conscience – see Hebrews 10:22, I Peter 3:21. It is in immersion that a person begins his participation in the gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is in immersion that we were buried with Christ; we were thrown into the tomb with Him – see Colossians 2:12. (As a sidenote, we should recognize the clear picture of immersion, not sprinkling or pouring). As Paul leads us through this faith picture given by God, he deals with two very important images. The first is that of a death and burial, while the second is a graphic portrayal of a resurrection. While the key points of the resurrected man are brought out in depth in some later verses, a glimmer is shown to us in verse 4. As important as the death of the old man is, its primary purpose is so that a new man can be raised. An important point from Scripture is here mentioned – there has to be a death before there can be a resurrection, but the real power is in the resurrection. Jesus had to offer Himself up to the point of death on a cross before He could be exalted through His resurrection and ascension. In the same manner, before a person can live a new life in Christ, he must die in immersion. It is through the process of a death, burial, and finally a resurrection that an individual is truly “born again” – see John 3:3-5. As communicated here in verse 4, the immersed individual is raised to “walk in newness of life.” This resurrection is brought about in the same manner in which Christ was raised from the dead – through the glory of the Father. The word “glory” is in itself a description of the resurrected state. Here it signifies the eternal power held by Yahweh – the power of eternal life. The Great Yahweh – He who is and who was and who is to come – is the essence of life and was the source of life in Christ’s resurrection as well as in each of ours at immersion.

6:5 – “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,” – Verse 5 is most definitely closely related with verses 3 and 4 as communicated by the word “for.” It is an emphasized conclusion of the previous thoughts. The initial point is that we are united with Christ in immersion. Again we do not want to underestimate the importance of immersion in regards to salvation; if a person is not immersed he is still separated from Christ. It is in the watery grave of immersion that a person is joined with Christ wherein the two become one. If Christ’s death made it possible for us to die to sin then *certainly* His resurrection brings about our spiritual resurrection – the power to walk in newness of life. Christ’s death was necessary for our death, but His indestructible life is the source of our life. Note that the power for us to live our new lives comes not from the cross but from the throne.

6:6-7 – “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; for

he who has died is freed from sin.” We know that the old man was crucified with Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, everyone that has been immersed was nailed to the cross with Him – see Galatians 2:20. The new condition of the Christian is *in Christ*, not *in Adam*. The body of sin that followed in the example of the first sinful man is done away with – the sinful nature is destroyed. What an awesome work of God in killing the old man! What an awesome description that the body of sin is done away with! When God opens a door no one can shut it, and when He closes a door no one can open it. Of course this grace of God is given in accordance with our faith. But if God decides to do away with something, who would want to bring it back? There is no place for an attitude of continuing in sin that grace might increase. It obviously misses the whole point of God’s grace, which is to deliver us from the bondage of sin. Everyone of us used to be “held captive” by the devil. Sin was our master, and we had no power to rebel. But thankfully we died and were set free from that evil taskmaster. In our death, all debts were paid and we are freed from the authority of sin. As the old song goes, “Be of sin the double cure; free me from its guilt and power.” The day of our immersion was a good day to die.

6:8-9 – “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.” – If we have died with Christ, then it is true that we shall live with Him. At our immersion, we not only died to sin but we were also raised to walk in newness of life. Our life with Christ is not something that will happen only in the future when we undergo the resurrection on the last day, rather, it is something that we encounter spiritually right now – see Colossians 3:1-4. Of course this faith that we have concerning our own death and resurrection is grounded in the indisputable fact of Christ’s resurrection. Unlike the resurrection of Lazarus or the widow’s son at Nain, Christ’s resurrection is permanent. He is the One spoken of whose “soul would not be abandoned to Hades” and whose body “would not undergo decay.” When Christ snapped the Roman seal on His tomb, He also broke Satan’s deathly hold on mankind – see Hebrews 2:14-15. The resurrected Christ is indeed “the first and the last, and the living One” who holds the “keys of death and of Hades.” He is never to die again for, by the power of an indestructible life, He has been declared High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. It is important for us to understand that the Christ who saves us and empowers us is the risen, conquering Christ. Death no longer is master over Him for by His resurrection He has been declared Lord of all.

6:10 – “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God.” – It is very important for us to understand that Jesus died once for all. In that one sacrifice, He completely paid the price for all sin – see Hebrews 9:24-26, 10:11-13. Now it is true that Jesus never sinned while He was in the flesh, but He did take on our sins. Christ “bore our sins in His body on the cross.” God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Satan was quick to accuse Him when He was “clothed in filthy garments” in our stead. The agony of the separation from God that He incurred is felt in the statement, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was fully sufficient to die to sin once for all. As important as His death was, His

ongoing life is even more vital to us. It was the Living High Priest that offered His blood in the true Holy Place. It is the Living Christ who has been exalted as Savior. It is the Living Prophet who warns from heaven. The life of the glorified Christ is a life that is lived not to men, nor to the world, but to God. Christ is in the heavenly realm and this world has no more impact on Him.

6:11 – “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” – The condition of the Christian has previously been established. Not only have we been justified by our faith in Christ, but we have participated in the gospel with Him. The old man of sin is dead and buried, while the new man has been raised to walk in newness of life. The faith picture of the Christian is here completed. While Abraham was to believe that God would give him a son in accordance with that which God had spoken, so the Christian is to believe God’s word concerning the new man. By faith, the Christian is to consider himself as glorified with Christ. “Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen.” This faith picture has to be a conviction of the mind and heart. This must be the way that we view ourselves when we think, plan, speak, and act. We are in Christ and He is in us. To hold to this belief in the midst of an unbelieving generation is to truly walk by faith. When we truly consider ourselves as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, then we really live. Does anybody see a connection here with the theme of Romans – “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

ROMANS CHAPTER 6:12-23

(Practical and practicing righteousness)

6:12 – “**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,**” – When God promised Abraham that he would bear a son, Abraham believed God and that belief was reckoned as righteousness. Because Abraham believed the words that God had spoken, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham. We see that God is always true to His word and that He accomplishes what He says He will. For the purpose of our point here, though, let us also examine this miraculous work from Abraham’s perspective. We know that Abraham’s faith was tested many years after the birth of Isaac when God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Abraham’s faith was such that he believed in God’s ability to raise the dead. Hence, he was willing to offer up his son of promise. Again, we know that Abraham was rewarded for his faith and God stayed his hand. Is it not true that God asks for the exact same faith from us? Under the New Covenant, doesn’t God require from us faith that He can raise the dead? In confessing that Jesus is Lord, we verbalize our faith that God raised Christ from the dead. In carrying out our lives as Christians, we get to demonstrate our faith that God has also raised us up from the dead. The thrust of this verse is that the faith picture given to us in our immersion has direct bearing upon our day-to-day performance. The first half of that faith picture leaves the old self a dead man – hence free from sin. The second half of that picture shows a resurrected man who is beyond the reach of sin. If we really believe God’s word concerning our immersion, then we will not let sin reign over us. We find that the end result of the faith of the Christian is practicing righteousness. What the law was never able to produce, God’s grace produces in the faithful Christian. As true Christians, we don’t nullify the law by our faith, but we establish the law.

6:13 – “**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.**” – Paul continues on with his thought concerning the practicing righteousness of the Christian. It is extremely critical that the individual not go back under law at this point to attempt to fulfill God’s plan. Law doesn’t work – it never has and never will. However, true faith does produce real change in the behavior of the Christian. Part of the faith picture that is presented in this chapter is that of a slave that has been set free. When the old man died all of the debts to that old master were paid. Now it is true that sin would still like us to believe that we are obligated to serve its interests. In the past we wore the mark of a slave to sin – 666. When our old master comes looking for his slaves it is important that we remember we no longer wear his mark. We do not have to report to duty; as a matter of fact, we are here compelled not to present the members of our body to that old master of sin. It is also important to recognize that the word used in this verse as “instruments” is better translated as “weapons.” It is important that we always keep the big picture in mind – there is a spiritual battle raging at all times. There is no such thing as a neutral party in this war; as the old song goes – you’re gonna serve somebody. If the members of our body (our hands, feet, eyes, mouth, etc.) are presented to sin, they are being used as weapons of war against righteousness. The exhortation from this verse is that every Christian really needs to view himself as alive from the dead. In accordance with this

inner picture, then the Christian presents himself to God as a resurrected soldier. All of body, soul, and spirit are presented to God for service. The members of our body now are being trained as weapons of righteousness for use in this army of God.

6:14 – “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.” – As has been well pointed out thus far in the book of Romans, the law has no power to bring about true righteousness. As a matter of fact, I Corinthians 15:56 states, “... the power of sin is the law.” However, on the flip side of the coin, God’s grace is able to produce righteousness in the faithful Christian. It is essential that we understand the gift of Christ was not limited to His perfect sacrifice for sin. That sacrifice certainly was necessary for the price to be paid for our sin. However, a major part of God’s gift to the Christian was the resurrection of Christ from the dead as well as His ascension to the throne. Through this work of Christ, Satan was cast out of heaven and Christ took His rightful seat on the throne. When we can behold with spiritual eyes the glory of the Lord, it is clear that Jesus Christ has established His complete superiority over Satan. If this is true in the heavenly realm, then how about in our lives? Is Jesus strong enough to do that which He set out to accomplish – (see I John 3:7-8) that is to destroy the works of the devil? Now it is true that Jesus Christ is Lord of all whether we ever acknowledge that or really believe it. However if we truly have faith that Christ is Yahweh on the throne, then we will sanctify Him as Lord in our hearts as well – see I Peter 3:15. It is by the grace of God that we can approach the “throne of grace” where we can “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). When we really grasp the meaning of God’s grace, we find that He has placed before us victory upon victory. The good news is that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord!

6:15-16 – “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 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?” – After stating above that the Christian is not under law, Paul realizes that some may miss the point (intentionally, I might add) and run after licentiousness. Because the Christian is not under law does not mean that there is no standard of righteousness. The standard of righteousness actually is now more clearly manifested in the essence of Christ Himself. The point of this whole chapter has been that God’s gracious working in accordance with the faith of the Christian allows the disciple of Christ to take on His character. With the necessary faith picture fully developed in the first part of this chapter, the apostle Paul now begins to bear down on the practical aspects of implementing this into our daily lives. The fact of the matter is that everyone is a slave to what he obeys. As long as we have a body, it will be used either for good purposes or for bad. The key issue here is lordship. Who is our Lord? At a practical level, it is important that we understand that we are creatures of habit. Whether those habits are good or bad determines the result – sin and death or obedience and righteousness. Some seemingly irrelevant and thus non-threatening habits are worth our attention to help us understand what creatures of habit we really are. It may be our habit to be very organized and neat or maybe unorganized and messy. It may be our habit to eat sweets and drink coffee or we may eat nutritious food and take our vitamins. Whatever the case may be, these actions that we carry out on a day-to-day

basis don't always require a lot of thought or even energy. We act in accordance with the habits that we have developed over the years. The same principle holds true in reference to our spiritual well-being. One person's habits may be to watch television, gossip, internalize politically correct dogmas, endorse socialism while speaking to others, and bow down to the idols of greed and covetousness. Another individual's habits may be to read the Bible, pray, memorize Scripture, speak to the lost about Christ, and worship God in spirit and in truth. Many of us by habit may be a combination of the aforementioned individuals. The point is that our habits establish our character and our character determines our eternal destiny. To change our practicing behavior requires a focused effort to change our habits. Again, it is essential to notice that we should not use law as a means of changing our habits. Law can motivate us to externally change our habits in general, but will not motivate us to change the desires of our heart. Developing our personal faith picture as revealed in Scripture is essential for us to be able to form good habits that are the overflow of our heart. The goal is for Jesus Christ to be Lord in every aspect of our lives.

6:17-18 – “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness,” – The potential in Christ for the Christian to overcome sin in his life is a tremendous blessing. All thanks and praise go to God for His grace that enables us not only to be declared righteous but also to develop practical and practicing righteousness. While we once were slaves to sin, that completely changed when we were obedient to the gospel. The following are some important points to note from this thought. 1) The “form of teaching” has to do with our immersion into Christ. Immersion is the mold or likeness of the basic teaching of the gospel – that Christ *died* for our sins, that He was *buried*, and that He was *raised* from the dead. 2) The gospel is something that must be obeyed. It is not simply something that we can “accept” or “receive,” but it is essential that we obey it – see II Thessalonians 1:8. 3) This obedience must come from the heart. Immersion is not a “work” or some “rite of passage.” When we are immersed we must understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. For immersion to be valid it must be done in accordance with our faith, not because someone else coerced us into it. That having been said, we understand that there was a change of allegiance when we were immersed into Christ. Our loyalty and sense of duty no longer lies with sin, but has been transferred to serving righteousness. Freedom from sin doesn't mean laziness – it means that we now have a cause that is worth fighting for. We are now truly enlisted soldiers, yes, even slaves, of the King!

6:19 – “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.” – The reason that the apostle Paul had to come back and work on this illustration of slaves and masters is because of the weakness of the flesh. It is relatively effortless to imagine doing great things. It is likewise easy to talk of big dreams and goals. But because the flesh is bound by physical laws such as those of inertia and thermodynamics, nothing worthwhile is easily accomplished. The reality is that we each are on a pilgrimage here on this earth before our bodies reach the

destination of glory. We each must drag our carcass with us while making our body a slave to our spirit. Hence, even the Christian is a slave either to bad habits or to good habits. The exhortation is for the individual Christian to develop habits that are worthy of one who presents himself to God as one alive from the dead. These good habits are what allow us to be “a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21).

6:20-21 – “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.” – The obvious initial point here is that a slave of sin cannot be righteous. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.” Unless a person has faithfully been immersed into Christ, he cannot be righteous. A non-Christian can certainly use some Godly principles to further his productivity and to enjoy a better physical life. This individual may even practice some good deeds, but they are all “dead works,” because in crunch-time he is still a slave to the devil. On the other hand, a person who has been immersed into Christ must form habits that are consistent with a resurrected soldier in order to receive any benefit. It is also important to temporarily reflect on our former manner of life. Those sinful habits to which we were enslaved (and are now ashamed) never brought about fulfillment. The devil has been a liar from the beginning as even in the Garden of Eden he oversold and underdelivered. It is good sometimes to remember the frustration level that is always experienced after reaping the consequences of sin. Of course we didn’t enjoy the cost of that slavery to sin, for the outcome of those things is death.

6:22 – “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” – There is a huge difference between service to the devil and service to God. While we were slaves to Satan, we were in *bondage* – we were forced to act in accordance with the desires of sin. However, in Christ we enjoy *freedom* – the freedom to do what our spirit really wants to do; we get to do the right thing every time. When we were slaves of Satan, there was no reward for our efforts; the only result was increased slavery. Now, as slaves of God, we get a benefit from the deeds that we perform in service to our Master. The immediate benefit is sanctification, that is, a lifestyle of holiness of which there is no shame. Instead of continually suffering from a guilty conscience, now there is great peace. Rather than facing the terrible consequences of sin (such as broken relationships, hangovers, credit card debt, etc.), we now reap immediate rewards (such as happy families, joyful attitudes, daily provisions from God, etc.). Of course what really tips the scales in favor of the slave of God is that final reward – eternal life.

6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – What a tremendous close to this powerful chapter! The apostle Paul brings us to the bottom line – either we serve sin and die or we serve God and live. Every form of death, whether it is physical or spiritual, temporary or eternal, comes as a result of sin. Sin pays a wage to its slave just as a general gives out rations to his

soldiers. If the members of our body have been used as weapons for sin in the war against righteousness, we will get the pay that we have earned – death. If, on the other hand, we have presented ourselves to God as resurrected soldiers, we receive a just reward. However, just in case we might begin to think that we have earned this reward through our works, we are reminded that eternal life is a free gift from God. This gift was paid for by Christ and is freely given to those who have Scriptural faith. There is no doubt that the outcome of faith is true obedience to our Lord, hence, that free gift of eternal life is given to those who are willing servants of the King.

ROMANS CHAPTER 7:1-6
(The Christian has died to the Law)

7:1 – “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?” – The aspect of the law that Paul obviously addresses here is that of a legal statute that demands total compliance. This law was a “... yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). Any individual who is dwelling in a country finds that he is under the jurisdiction of that law as long as he lives there. As has been previously established in the book of Romans, there is a universal law that applies to every person who has reached the age of accountability. Hence, this law has universal jurisdiction over every living person. This universal law has such high standards that every accountable individual has broken it. What then is to be done when it is impossible to live under such a system? There is only one means of escape – that is to die!

7:2-3 – “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. 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.” – Paul turns to an analogy that most people can easily relate to – that of marriage. The marriage relationship is a bond that God expects us to completely honor. The law of marriage is very clear that this bond is to last a lifetime – “What God has joined together, let no man separate.” The marriage vows almost always include the phrase “till death do us part.” If a woman rejects her husband and chooses to be joined to another man, she is an adulteress. There is no legal way to remove this bond besides the death of one partner. If the husband dies, the woman is free to marry another man without being branded as an adulteress. The obvious connection that the Spirit wants us to make is that of our relationship with the Law. The Law was a good husband, but he set his standards so high that the wife could never achieve them. The Law had no means of motivation for his wife to meet his demands. The end result of this type of relationship is one of slavery instead of partnership. This slavery eventually leads to the death of the wife. In other words, the Law has been called “the ministry of death.” This point has been well established already in the book of Romans as well as the rest of the New Testament. So, we might ask if there is any hope. Is there any way that we can end up having a fulfilled, life-giving relationship with another partner? Praise God there is hope!

7:4 – “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.” – As we noted earlier, in the physical marriage relationship, the only way that a spouse can be legally joined to a different person than previously is through the death of the first partner. The same is true in the spiritual realm. A person can’t just cast off the Law, for it holds every adult accountable. In this case, the Law didn’t die, but the Christian died to the Law in immersion. This death of ours occurred through the body of Christ. It is good to recognize that God prepared this means of escape for us. Through the offering of Christ,

God paid our debts to the Law, so that upon our participation in Christ's death, the Law no longer has jurisdiction over us. We now are married to Christ (we were united with Him in the likeness of His death), who has been raised from the dead. Notice that it is not the crucified Christ but the glorified Christ with whom we have this relationship. One of the purposes of this union is to bear fruit for God. From the beginning of Creation, when Adam and Eve were joined together, God told them to be fruitful and multiply. In this spiritual marriage, there is also fruit to be produced. Certainly there should be fruit of the Spirit in our lives – see Galatians 5:22-23. However, the thrust of fruit throughout Scripture, particularly easy to understand through the marriage illustration, is offspring. God expects us to bring forth Godly offspring for Him – see John 15:1-8. A spiritual relationship with the Law was never able to produce this fruit, but one with the risen Christ will bring forth fruit – see Matthew 21:33-44.

7:5-6 – “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. 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.” – In the past, before our immersion, we were in the flesh. The old man was still kickin’ and all of the evil desires and sinful passions were at work within him. The Law, being a harsh husband, didn’t know how to motivate us in a positive manner. Instead, this husband had an uncanny way of “pushing our buttons” so that the sinful passions became fully awake. (We will discuss the way that happened later in this chapter). The end result was that the members of our body committed sinful deeds of which the outcome is always death. Thankfully, though, in our present state we have been set free from that harsh husband. In our immersion into Christ, the old man of flesh died, and the Law no longer has jurisdiction over us. The vows that bound us “till death do us part” have been fulfilled and are no longer applicable to the new man. The Law no longer knows how to arouse the evil passions because we are now beyond his reach. Hence, we get to serve a new husband in a new manner. When the Law demanded our obedience, we, at best, grudgingly obeyed, or, at worst, openly rebelled. However, our new husband doesn’t simply demand our obedience. He has earned our obedience through His precious sacrifice on our behalf. Christ doesn’t attempt to manipulate us through “pushing our buttons;” rather, He has won our heart. The beauty of the New Covenant is that it truly liberates us – see II Corinthians 3:17. Now we earnestly desire to please our Lord and Husband, Jesus Christ. The great prophetic statement out of Jeremiah concerning the New Covenant has been fulfilled through the grace of Jesus Christ – see Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Old Covenant written on stone was “the ministry of death” because it couldn’t ever change our desires. The New Covenant is a life-giving law that is written in our minds and on our heart. We even are the beneficiaries of the indwelling Holy Spirit who helps us watch over our hearts from which flow the springs of life.

ROMANS CHAPTER 7:7-13

(Sin uses the Law to kill)

7:7-8 – “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.” But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.” – Because of the harmful effects of living under law, many people at this juncture may begin to equate the Law with sin. The Law (whether it be the written law or the law of conscience) is the means by which death has come to every individual who is old enough to be held accountable for his actions. Now we must answer where the fault lies. In this next section, Paul points out that the problem is not with the Law, but with sin. The great apostle uses his own experiences to show the means by which sin uses the Law to accomplish its deadly desire. Every single one of the Ten Commandments except for “Honor your father and your mother” is negatively phrased. In other words, they all include the phrase “Thou shalt not.” Because the Law specifically states what should be avoided, sin automatically suggests itself to the individual by putting his focus upon that which is evil. The specific example used by Paul is the sin of coveting. All of the other commandments, at least on the surface, seem to deal with the externals. However, the commandment against coveting goes right to the core of desire. Coveting simply means desiring what someone else has. At other times this word is translated “lust” or “desire.” Covetousness can be a desire for something sinful in and of itself, or it can simply be a wrong motive for something that is not inherently evil. In the case of Paul, sin took opportunity through this commandment against coveting to produce in him coveting of every kind. Coveting is a great example because it is the type of sin that is easy to justify or to deceive yourself about it. The law against it makes a person more aware of their sin, which sin then uses to gain even more power. As Paul says here, “apart from the Law sin is dead.”

7:9 – “I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;” – While Paul continues to use himself as an example, what is true of him is true of every other individual. Every child is alive apart from the Law – see Matthew 18:3, 10; Isaiah 7:15-16. However, at some point in a person’s life, the Law (whether coming from the written law, or from the God-given conscience) comes – in other words, it has bearing upon the person. At this point in time, the person follows the course described in James 1:14-15. Sin which was dead apart from the Law, becomes alive, and the person who was alive apart from the Law now dies. Such is the record of every individual apart from Christ (who Himself victoriously fulfilled the requirement of the Law by faith).

7:10-12 – “and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” – There is no doubt that the Law is in itself holy – that by means of ordinances it sets the standard of what is right and good. It is even true that if a person could keep the Law that he would be able to live by it – see Leviticus 18:5.

Hence, the honest individual with a desire for holiness sets out to fulfill that which the Law requires. Unfortunately, when a person sets off on that course, he is destined to fail. In Paul's sojourn on earth, his attempts to live by means of the Law brought about the exact opposite result – death! Such is the case for everyone who has attempted to (spiritually) run faster, and try harder in order to meet the righteous requirement of the Law. The real problem is that sin takes opportunity through the commandment and deceives the individual who is trying to attain righteousness by means of the Law. Of course, as has been well pointed out previously, the end result of this deception is death.

7:13 – “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.” – Paul has previously stated that the commandment brought death to him personally, just as it has to the spiritual life of every accountable individual. Yet it has also clearly been stated that the Law itself is a good thing. How can something so good result in something so bad? Paul emphatically states that the good thing (the Law) cannot take the blame for the bad result. Maybe we can understand this principle by examining something in the physical realm. A common bumper sticker paraded by those championing their “right to keep and bear arms” states, “Guns don’t kill people. People kill people.” Since guns themselves are neutral, they cannot be blamed for a murder committed by the hands of a hardened criminal. (Obviously, the same would hold true for a piece of rope, a knife, or any other neutral object used with evil intent). In the case of murder, full responsibility must be laid at the feet of the person who committed this dreadful act, no matter the weapon involved. In the spiritual realm, sin must take full blame for the spiritual death of countless billions. Sin has taken something that was good (its only weakness was the inability to make perfect; in other words, it only acts when broken – see Hebrews 7:19, 8:7, 10:1-4), and has systematically used it to spiritually murder individual after individual. However, what Satan has used for his evil purposes, God still can use to lead us back to Him. The horrible nature of sin is manifested to all when it uses such a holy commandment to perform its dastardly deeds. Was it the Law’s fault that we all died? May it never be! Let us place all of our disgust for these gruesome killings squarely at the door of sin.

ROMANS 7:14-25

(The means by which sin uses the Law to deceive and kill)

Read 7:14-25. Much debate has centered on verses 14-25 over the centuries. The question that seems to pose so much trouble is “who is in bondage to sin?” The majority of those with a Calvinistic persuasion claim that Paul is speaking of himself as a Christian in these verses. If that is the case, then these verses apply to all Christians; in the terms of some from this persuasion, these verses tell of the “sanctified struggle.” Many arguments are presented by neoCalvinists to attempt to show that Paul cannot be speaking of a nonChristian in these verses. However, the main argument boils down to this – since man is totally depraved since Adam’s fall, it is impossible for someone to even feel this struggle apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual’s life (remember Calvinistic TULIP). Now it is also true that many in opposition to Calvinism over the years have presented a case saying that this is not a Christian at all, but is an unregenerate person who is under law. As a matter of fact, even many who strongly hold Calvin’s view of this passage admit that their view was not favored by the “early church,” and that most exegetes claim that the context portrays a person under law. All of that having been said, it is totally irrelevant what anyone’s opinion is of these verses – see 2 Peter 1:20-21. The only thing that matters is what the Scripture says, so let us examine this passage in the whole context of Romans. As we do this, we find that the following passage clearly communicates the means by which sin uses the Law to deceive and kill the well-meaning individual who has placed himself under the Law. It is essential that we recognize that God has put all of mankind in the same cycle – He does not show partiality. The events that transpired in the life of Paul from the time that he was a child until his conversion have happened in the life of every individual who has reached the age of accountability. As was previously pointed out, every person starts out alive apart from the Law, but when it applies to him, sin springs up and he dies – see verse 9. At this juncture, God uses the Law to bring mankind to a recognition of his need for help because of his separation from God – see Galatians 3:22-24. While sin uses the Law to bring about death, God uses the awareness of this death to bring man back to Him. It is precisely this topic that is the focus of Romans 7:14-25. Now let us examine these verses a few at a time and nail down their meaning from the immediate context of Romans.

7:14 – “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” – There is no doubt that the Law in and of itself is a good thing. Just because sin used the Law as the weapon to commit horrendous destruction does not somehow make the Law evil or even fleshly. The Law is spiritual; it sets a standard that is consistent with what a spiritual person would perform in his daily life. As a matter of fact, we would expect a truly spiritual person to meet the righteous requirement of the Law (Romans 8:4 shouldn’t surprise us). It is not because the Law is unspiritual that sin is able to use it against a person, on the contrary, the real problem is the fleshly side of man – see Genesis 6:3. Because of the weakness of the flesh, sin is able to manipulate mankind through the Law. Hence fleshly man is sold into bondage to sin. Now we must determine what man is here spoken of as being of flesh. Obviously Paul is using himself as an example, but is he speaking of himself before or after he was a Christian?

Thankfully, the prior context of chapter 6 and the early part of chapter 7 as well as the following context of Romans 8 fully answers this question for us.

- 1) Examine Romans 7:5. It is clear that the man of flesh is the old man who was still bound to the Law. This unregenerate, fleshly man bore fruit for death.
- 2) Examine Romans 7:6 along with 8:4. The Christian is spoken of as a person who walks according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh.
- 3) Examine Romans 8:9. The Christian is not in the flesh but in the Spirit because the Spirit of God dwells in him.

All of the evidence from the context of this passage is that the man of flesh is a person who is under law. Therefore, the man of flesh cannot be the faithful Christian, because he has been released from the Law.

What about the man who is sold into bondage to sin? Is this a Christian or a person under the Law?

- 1) Examine Romans 6:6. The person who has been faithfully immersed into Christ is no longer a slave of sin.
- 2) Examine Romans 6:17-18. Every single Christian was in the past, at a point prior to their conversion, a slave of sin. However, the Christian is now free from sin and a slave of righteousness.
- 3) Examine Romans 6:20-22. The Christian is no longer a slave of sin, but a slave of God.

Again, we see that the Holy Spirit clearly indicates that the Christian is not the person herein described. Before his intense discussion of the fight with sin that is experienced by a person under law, the apostle Paul went to great lengths to ensure that the Christian knows he has been set free from this deathly struggle. After keying in on this war under law, Paul again emphasizes that this is not the realm of the Christian. Throughout the book of Romans, it has been communicated that the key to victory is faith. The Holy Spirit gave sufficient proof that the Christian living by faith does not have to live and die a slave of sin. The question is now settled; Paul is speaking of himself under law. Now we can properly understand the means by which sin uses the Law to kill the individual who is under its jurisdiction.

7:15-16 – “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. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.” – When a person acknowledges God’s law (written or unwritten), he can readily determine right and wrong, good and evil. However, when his sinful passions are aroused by the Law and he commits sin, it is difficult to comprehend what is going on. Those who haven’t seared their consciences feel a tremendous struggle when they act contrary to the Law. Addictions (amplified issues of sin) are a good example of this tremendous struggle. Part of the individual really hates the trap of sin, while another part is drawn to it. Yet, through this very process of feeling guilty, there is recognition that the Law is right.

Unless a person sears his conscience completely, there is no way to break free from this struggle without becoming a Christian.

7:17-20 – “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 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. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing that I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” – When a person acts contrary to that which he internally desires, he sins against his own will. At this point, it is fair to say that he is possessed – he is indwelt by sin. The individual who is attempting to live under law finds that there is not anything good living in him. This individual’s will may even win a majority of the time, but when the pressure is on, he finds that he falls prey to an internal force that is stronger than his will. When sin possesses the flesh of a person, the result is the commission of evil that is not even desired by the person. The real culprit once again is sin which has used a good thing (the Law) to infiltrate a neutral thing (the human body) to carry out its horrible atrocities. There are a couple of very important things that should here be noticed. 1) In accordance with what we have already established, this person cannot be a Christian. Twice in these verses the individual is described as being indwelt by sin. According to Romans 8:9-11, the Christian is said to be in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Twice in these verses of chapter 8, the Christian is said to be indwelt by the Spirit, not by sin. 2) When Paul points out the actual possession of a person by sin, he is in no way removing personal accountability. Just as a person cannot receive the Spirit unknowingly, neither can an individual be indwelt by sin accidentally. No person is possessed by a demon nor “hexed” without his permission. The point made by Paul is that once a person has been deceived by sin through means of the Law, he cannot consistently fight off this evil intruder without help. As a matter of fact, the harder he tries to resist by means of the Law, the more intense the struggle and the worse the inevitable defeat.

7:21 – “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.” – Here is found the governing principle of a person operating by means of law. When an individual places himself under law, he finds that within himself, evil is always lurking nearby. While the desire to do good is also present within him, sin continues to manifest itself and manipulate him through means of the Law.

7:22-23 – “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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.” – Again, the problem is not God’s law, nor is the problem the way that God created man. Internally, every human being knows what is right and even has a built-in desire to do good. Man is not totally depraved, as evidenced by the fact that even Gentiles without the written law could “do instinctively the things of the Law” – see Romans 2:14-15. However, the honest individual acknowledges that when he “keeps score,” he falls far short in carrying out that which is required by the Law. The fleshly side of man is manipulated by sin and wages war against the spiritual side of man. The unregenerate person finds that he is a slave, yes, even a prisoner of the law of sin that reveals itself in the members of his body.

There is no doubt that this struggle is real, and that it is a tremendous war. However, the context of Romans clearly indicates that the Christian should not find himself in this position. (If he does, it is obvious that he is attempting to live by law, rather than by faith). The latter half of Romans 6 pointed out that the “members” of a Christian’s body are not slaves of sin, but instruments and slaves of righteousness.

7:24-25 – “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 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.” – The battle against sin continues to intensify in the life of a person who is under law. Suicidal tendencies, loser’s limps, depression, anger, feelings of worthlessness, confusion, and despair are all casualties from this war. The dishonest person either turns to lawlessness or begins to impose law on everyone else to make himself feel better. The truth-seeker cries out, “Who will set me free?” (Notice that while sin has used the law to kill the individual, God is able to use this despair to get people to turn to Him). Yes, there is a solution! The answer comes from God through Jesus Christ. The answer will be fully explained in chapter 8. Praise God, the Christian is not stuck in Romans 7. Many Christians have taken a detour on this path in the futile attempt to be justified by law. When righteousness is sought by means of law, the battle cannot be won. There is a continual feeling of a split personality, the inner man vs. the flesh. Let us not live in a chapter 7 state of schizophrenia, but let us grow in faith into chapter 8!

ROMANS CHAPTER 8:1-13

(The Spirit gives life)

8:1 – “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” –

Every accountable individual (except for Christ) has found himself on the losing side of the battle described in the latter half of chapter 7. When sin gains power through the Law, the result is complete havoc for the soul of the individual. The strong forces of sin have twisted and bent him so that he cries out in anguish, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” The earnings of “self-help” books continue to rise year after year as people try to find release from the guilt that ravages their consciences. Drug and alcohol abuse is an age-old problem because mankind attempts to escape consciousness of sins. Millions turn to the “new age” religions (eastern mysticism repackaged for western consumption) hoping that they might find some salve for their hurting souls. Multitudes pursue pleasure at all costs in hopes of replacing the feelings of emptiness with those of euphoria. The problem with all of these devices is that they are futile. There is only one way by which mankind can be set free from the guilt of sin – that is through Jesus Christ. The Scripture here emphasizes that right *now* there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. This is not some “pie in the sky that we’ll get by and by.” Freedom is truly granted to those who are *in* Christ Jesus. As was previously pointed out in Romans chapter 6, a person enters into Christ at his immersion. Upon entrance into Christ, freedom from the Law is granted which results in freedom from both the guilt and power of sin. Truly there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

8:2 – “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” –

Truly there is a law that leads to death, but there also is a law that brings life. The seventh chapter of Romans clearly demonstrated the means by which sin was able to bring about death through law. The first law was a law of sin while the second law is a law of the Spirit. We lived as slaves under the law of sin, but we find great freedom under the law of the Spirit. The law engraved on stone gave us just enough rope to hang ourselves, but the law written in our minds and on our hearts has removed the rope altogether. The first covenant rendered a continual judgment of condemnation, while the superior covenant renders a continual acquittal of justification. The ministry of death left us in a state of hopelessness, but the ministry of the Spirit brings total fulfillment. Sadly, the majority of mankind is still under the jurisdiction of the first law, but thankfully, the Christian gets to enjoy the freedom of the Spirit. The whole reason that there is no condemnation for the Christian is because of the work of the Spirit. The futility of the man from Romans 7 is a thing of the past as we now experience the abundant life promised by Christ. The gospel truly is good news!

8:3-4 – “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, 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 describe the means by which God sets the individual free from sin. It has been well established that the Law couldn’t release anyone from the bonds of sin and death.

But what the Law couldn't do, God has done! God's eternal purpose is now being fulfilled under the New Covenant. The first step in moving us past the Law was that of God sending His own Son. God knew ahead of time the sufferings that Christ would have to endure in order to bring us to Him, yet He was pleased to crush His own Son for our sake. There was absolutely no other way for God's plan for us to be realized. The Scripture here speaks of two essential actions of Christ to condemn sin in the flesh. The first earth-shattering statement in these verses is that Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh. The full significance of this statement is often overlooked. One of the major barriers to a person's fulfilling the requirement of the Law (perfection) is the feeling that it cannot be done. God emphatically removes this mental obstacle by proving that it can be done through Jesus Christ. When Jesus came in the flesh, He faced every tough situation that we must encounter. He was "made like His brethren in all things" – Hebrews 2:17. Jesus indeed was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" – Hebrews 4:15. Christ proved to us that the human body is not totally depraved. He showed us what can be done in this body when the spirit is in complete subjection to the Father. When Christ established that it is possible to live righteously in the body, He freed us from the negative thoughts that resound, "Nobody's perfect." Because of Christ's example while in flesh and blood, we are now mentally free to step up our performance. The second action performed by Christ to condemn sin in the flesh is stated in another tremendous declaration. Christ came as an offering for sin! Not only is a person held back by incorrectly thinking that no one can live perfectly in the human body, but he is also limited by his own past performance. This first problem was taken care of through the example of Christ; the second issue requires a payment to remove the shortcomings of yesterday. The devil's favorite tool may well be discouragement, and he is quick to kick the sands of the past into a person's face to keep them mired in their present condition. However, Christ has a solution that snaps the chains of Satan's hold on our mind! Yesterday is gone; it doesn't count against the Christian. The glorified Christ in His position as the eternal High Priest has offered the sacrifice of Himself and permanently buried our past. In condemning sin in the flesh, Christ has put us in a position of no condemnation. As written in Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." Having been set free from impossibility thinking and having been released from the failures of yesterday, the Christian truly has the potential to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law. In obvious agreement with the whole context of the book of Romans, it is clear that this accomplishment will not come by means of the Law. Rather, it will come by the power of the Spirit working in the faithful Christian who realizes that he has died to the flesh and lives in the Spirit.

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." – The key to life for the Christian is stated in this simple verse. It is essential that a person be immersed into Christ just to get on the path that leads to life. It is absolutely necessary that a person gather at the Lord's Table in order to sustain life. However, the individual Christian completely misses the point if he thinks of these life-changing faith pictures as mere rituals or rites of passage. The whole purpose of immersion and the Lord's Supper is to help us alter our mindset from the fleshly unto the spiritual. An immersed person who weekly partakes of the Lord's Supper but continues to set his mind on the things of

the flesh is still in the flesh. This individual doesn't have the faith necessary for his soul to be saved. In other words, his mind is locked in on a picture that has been supplied by the world and he most certainly will walk according to that picture. However, the perspective of the faithful Christian has completely changed. The person who walks by faith has a "mindset" on the Spirit, that is, those good things that are visible only to the spiritual eye.

8:6-8 – “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 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, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” – For the Christian, it is a fact that the old self has died with Christ in immersion. It is also true that the old man of sin has been done away with. God's Word even establishes that a new man has been raised to walk in newness of life. However, one thing that God has not removed is free choice. There are only two choices for the Christian; one results in death while the other results in life and peace. If a raised up Christian quits walking by faith, then he chooses to dig up the old man. The doubting Christian sets his mind on the flesh and ends up in the same state he was before he was immersed into Christ – dead. This person is well described as one who is dead even while he lives. The one who doubts chooses a fleshly path, whether it be the route of lawlessness or that of law. The only reason that a Christian would take one of these paths is because he really doesn't want to be like Christ. The lawless or licentious character is hoping to take the easy route and still get to heaven. This person has deceived himself into thinking that he can choose earth and still receive heaven. This thinking is hostile toward God – it sets a person at direct enmity with God – see James 4:4 and Jude 4-6. The Christian who places himself and others under law has ceased to live by faith. This individual is also hoping to find an easier way to glory. This manifestation of the fleshly mindset shows a person who wants to meet the minimum requirements to enter the eternal kingdom. The law system doesn't demand any thought or desire of the heart so it is much easier to just go through the motions in order to pass the test. Someone who is stuck in this fleshly mindset also has become at odds with Christ and will end up in hell if he doesn't change his thinking – see Galatians 5:4. Nobody on either of these destructive courses can subject themselves to God's law. Neither licentiousness nor law will produce a person who can fulfill the requirement of the Law. In the fleshly state it is impossible to please God! On the positive side, the Christian who grows in faith and lives by faith sets his mind on the Spirit. This is someone whose greatest ambition is to please God. This faithful individual presents himself to God as one who is alive from the dead. He sets his mind on the things above where Christ lives. He recognizes that he has been seated with Christ in the heavenly places and that he is now a citizen of the heavenly realm. This righteous man lives by faith and experiences a peace that passes all comprehension.

8:9 – “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.” – The reason that a faithful Christian can fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law is summarized in this verse. The Christian understands that his flesh was removed at his immersion into Christ – see Colossians 2:11-12. (As a sidenote, this verse verifies

that the latter half of Romans 7 is not talking about the faithful Christian). Many will want to argue this point claiming, “I can still see you, so you must still be in the flesh.” However, if one believes what the word of God has spoken, he realizes that the flesh was cut off and thrown away. Now it is essential that we come to an understanding of walking by faith and not by sight. This is the New Testament definition of faith given in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen*.” Understanding the fact that those who are in Christ are new creatures, it is easy to see why we recognize no person according to the flesh – see 2 Corinthians 5:16-17. Hence, we would expect those who are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit, to be able to live righteously, thus fulfilling the requirement of the Law. Of course it is important that all of this is conditional. The Scripture uses a key word here – “if.” All of these things are true only if the Spirit of God dwells in a person. If a person doesn’t have the Holy Spirit abiding in him, then he doesn’t belong to Christ and he is still under law. Therefore, one of the most important questions ever asked in the Bible was queried by the apostle Paul to some disciples in Acts 19:2, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” To be in the peaceful state of “no condemnation,” every individual had better test themselves to see if they are indwelt by the Spirit – see 2 Corinthians 13:5. It is essential that we have confidence from the Scriptures that we have received the Spirit so that we may have confidence at Christ’s return.

8:10-11 – “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 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.” – It seems that the whole of our existence revolves around the points of life and death. So many times we are caught up in concern over physical life when our real concern should be that of spiritual life. If a person is not in Christ or if a person has a mind that is set on the flesh, his body may still be carrying out its functions, but he is really dead. On the other hand, if Christ dwells in a person, then he is truly alive! The Christian’s body is dead because of sin (in other words, fleshly appetites have been starved to death), yet the newly born spirit is alive because of Christ’s righteousness. The source of this life in Christ is the Holy Spirit who, in verses 9-11 is called: 1) the Spirit, 2) the Spirit of God, 3) the Spirit of Christ, 4) Christ in you, and 5) the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead. It is really exciting to understand that the same Spirit and power that raised the body of Jesus from physical death is at work in the Christian. While certainly the Spirit is a guarantee of our final bodily resurrection, the emphasis in verse 11 is on the spiritual life that is now manifested in the *mortal body* of the believer that is indwelt by the Spirit. The Christian gets to experience the abundant life promised by Christ in John 10:10. When a Christian pours himself out in suffering and sacrifice, he finds that his well never runs dry. It is as if “rivers of living water” flow from deep within him – see John 7:38-39. And if Christ is in you, there is plenty of living water to share with others.

8:12-13 – “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—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.” – In these verses there is a slight transition from the earlier part of this chapter. While the first

part of the chapter has put tremendous importance upon mindset, the main emphasis was upon the Spirit Whom God has given to us. Now, while continuing to relate the necessity of the power of the Spirit in our lives, Paul puts emphasis upon our duty. Earlier he has spoken of the great freedom in Christ; now he points out that freedom is held through responsibility. Most assuredly we can see this in the physical sense, but how much more in the spiritual realm. Christians are under obligation; there is accountability that accompanies our freedom. As a wise man once summarized from the Wisdom of God, "The gates of glory are open only to those who carry the cross." Many misled individuals believe that freedom in Christ is an authorization to "do whatever feels good." Those who practice humanism under the guise of Christianity have confused liberty with licentiousness. With the quantity and intensity of Scriptural teaching on this subject (e.g. Jude 3,4), it is obvious that Christians must be on guard against lawlessness. It is important for each individual Christian to realize that he has reported to duty in the Lord's army. The Christian is not his own being, so he cannot do his own thing. The fact that his obligation is not to the flesh was covered extensively in the latter half of Romans 6. Whoever has "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" should "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" – Romans 13:14. Anyone who insists upon living in accordance with the flesh will be dead spiritually, now and for eternity. On the positive side, anyone who puts to death the deeds of the body will live. Notice that overcoming the flesh is not accomplished by means of a person's own power. The only way that we can win is by a firm reliance upon the power of the Spirit who has already proven what He can do in a physical body. It is essential that we understand our responsibility as Christians because our eternity is at stake. If we are going to accomplish that which the heavenly Father has purposed for us, then we must live the abundant life. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come!"

ROMANS CHAPTER 8:14-25

(Hopeful Sons of God)

8:14 – “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” – A major point of the previous verses of chapter 8 is that life or death depends on whether or not we walk according to the Spirit. Here we find a transition of thought but with continuing emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. Now the apostle Paul focuses his attention on the Christian’s standing as a son of God. It has already been well established that no person can enter into Christ apart from immersion into His death. However, the nature of faith under the New Covenant is such that it is possible for a person to be immersed into Christ for the right reasons and then turn around and set his mind on the things of the flesh. If he was truly immersed for the right reasons, he received the Holy Spirit in accordance with faith. However, if he does not continue to live by faith, he is not being led by the Spirit. This immersed individual holding a fleshly mindset is no more a son of God than a person who has never been immersed. In accordance with salvation by faith, only those who are led by the Spirit hold the rights of sonship. At this juncture, it is worth asking about the manner in which the Spirit leads. Many who do not have a clear understanding of Scripture look for outward manifestations of the Spirit in order to have some sort of “proof” that they are being led by the Holy Spirit. (A friendly word of warning to those who might be led astray by the false doctrine of present-day manifestation of gifts of the Holy Spirit: remember the story of the Emperor’s New Clothes). Others are awaiting a tug on their emotions in hopes of finding “confirmation” from the Spirit. Still other people attempt to make deals with God saying, “If so and so happens, I trust that it is the will of the Spirit that I do this.” Of course, the New Testament never leads (pun intended) us to hear from the Spirit in the above-mentioned manners. The primary means that the Spirit leads us is through the Word of God, specifically the New Testament. It is the New Covenant that is specifically called the “ministry of the Spirit” – see 2 Corinthians 3:8. Whenever a Christian is willing to look intently into the perfect law of liberty, he receives the Word of God implanted and becomes an effectual doer. This new creature who has been born again of an imperishable seed is indeed a son of God. It is certainly true that the Holy Spirit can lead us through circumstances in our lives over which we have no control, but those circumstances mean nothing to us unless our senses have been trained for discernment. This training comes through practice from the “solid food” of God’s Word. If we truly are led by the Spirit, then we live our lives in accordance with the Scriptures. As is well stated in 1 John 3:10, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

8:15-16 – “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!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,” – The incredible freedom that is available to the Christian under the New Covenant is again expressed from a slightly different vantage point. There is such an advantage of being a son instead of a slave. Slaves are under a constant feeling of dread for the punishment that will be administered if they fail to fulfill their duties. Fear is the sole motivation for

the slaves of Satan's field and they know that when their usefulness is past, they will suffer death. What a contrast between slaves and sons! The leading of the Spirit as described in verse 14 is not a situation of oppressive control. It is true that the sons still work on the Father's vineyard, but they work in hope and joy knowing that there is a full reward. When the apostle Paul mentions adoption, he is communicating something very significant. There are those who would make the claim that "we are all God's children." It is certainly true that God created man in His image, but when an individual sins, he becomes a slave of Satan. The only means by which we can become children of God is for God to buy us back. In this adoption, there are some requirements for us to become God's children – e.g. See 2 Corinthians 6:17,18. When the Romans adopted someone, the adopted male became a son as well as the heir. Adoption was generally practiced for the purpose of perpetuating property ownership or for social privilege. Adoption was not something that seems to have been formally carried out by the Jews apart from the marriage relationship – see John 8:35,36 and Exodus 21:7-9. When we put the legality of adoption together with the principles set forth under the Old Testament, we can understand the spiritual significance of our adoption as sons. The word "Abba" also conveys the strength of the relationship between a son and his dad. This word originally meant "Daddy" and was used by small children. It is the word used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was crying out to God the Father. This word is not used as an obligatory token to a step-dad, but when it comes from the adopted sons, it shows the love that flows between them and their true Dad. Finally there is the point that the Holy Spirit bears witness with us that we are indeed children of God. Many of the poor, underprivileged multitudes of Rome would have loved to make claim to being an adopted son of a powerful member of that society. However, there had to be *legal claim* in order for a person to really be a son. In the same manner, many today claim to be children of God without any proper legal claim. Many among the denominations speak of a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ. The heart of the matter is reached by a quick question from my buddy Kevin Simpson, "That's great! But does He know about it?" It is not enough to claim to be a child of God, there must be a witness that He knows us and has received us as His children – see Galatians 4:9. The Holy Spirit is the seal of our redemption and the legal proof of our adoption as sons.

8:17 – "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." – It truly is a great honor to be a part of the most respected and powerful family in the universe. This high standing as adopted children of God gives us some very substantial rights. First of all, we are heirs of God. Many fight and scratch and claw in order to be left an heir of a wealthy person at the time of that individual's passing away. Yet any earthly inheritance will give out at some point. The inheritance that comes from God doesn't come from His death for He is Yahweh – the One Who is from everlasting to everlasting. Hence, our inheritance will never be depleted. It is also true that the One bequeathing the inheritance is very rich. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills as well as all the silver and gold. It is a tremendous privilege to be an heir of the Creator of the universe. The second main point is that, as heirs of God, we are fellow heirs with Christ. The Scripture pictures our relationship with Christ in many different ways. Here, we are pictured as being brothers with Christ. The second chapter of Hebrews communicates that God's intention has

always been to bring many sons to glory. One of the main reasons that Christ came in the flesh was to be an older brother who would give help to His younger siblings. As brothers with Christ, we get to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Not only do we get to reign with Christ now and in the future, but we also get a new name, a crown, and a new body of glory. The glory that is yet to be revealed to us is not simply a great gift, but it is something that we can claim the right to as heirs with Christ. The third main point of this verse is that the right of first-born sons of promise is conditional. We must understand that the road to glory is paved with suffering. If Christ, the eldest brother, learned obedience through the things which he suffered, the same is true of the younger family members. A price is always required to receive anything of real value. True sons of God manifest themselves through their willingness to suffer as Christians. As Jesus said in Mark 8:34, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

8:18 – “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.” – The apostle Paul is certainly one who is aptly qualified to speak on the issue of present sufferings. Here is a man who, for the sake of Christ, was in many labors, in many imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times he received the maximum number of stripes from the Jews. On three separate occasions he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned and left for dead (probably actually died). Three times he was shipwrecked, a day and a night he spent in the deep. In addition to all of that, he was in frequent dangers of his life, some even from false brethren. Paul had undergone many nights without sleep, had been often without food, and had literally been left out in the cold. This guy could rightly say, "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus." Yet when he put all of his sufferings on the scale, they were not even enough to make an impact on the balance because of the weight of glory. One of the reasons for this statement is that the sufferings are temporal, while glory is eternal. How can you even begin to compare a fleeting existence in this world with eternity? The song, "Amazing Grace" well brings out this thought with the words, "When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." Not only is the eternal aspect incomparable with the temporal, but the worst experiences of suffering on this earth cannot be compared with the ecstatic joy that we will experience in heaven. The glory of the resurrected state far exceeds the glory of all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The last chapters of the book of Revelation bring out in physical pictures the fact that the glories of heaven far exceed the glories of this marvelous creation. It is important for us to understand that, although the price of glory is great, the best investment that we can ever make is to store up treasures in heaven.

8:19-22 – “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 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. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” – The glory that is to come is so marvelous that the whole creation looks

forward to the day when it is revealed. It is not only God's children, but also nature itself that has a vested interest in the revealing of the sons of God. Remember that God created the whole world for the sustenance of man on this planet. The whole creation was put in subjection to man in the Garden of Eden. However, we find that the fulfillment of creation's subjection to man comes through its subjection to Christ – see Psalm 8:3-8 with Hebrews 2:5-9. Even the inanimate creation speaks of God's glory and desires to be able to express its belief of the Christ – see Psalm 19:1-6, Luke 19:37-40. However, as a result of Adam's sin in Eden, not only was mankind put under a curse, but also the rest of creation. The Second Law of Thermodynamics was put into effect, and the whole of creation began to wind down. God has chosen to use the problems of death and decay to impress upon mankind the temporal nature of this earthly existence. The goal in all of this is to get us to look upwards and long for the eternal. In the same way, the creation has its neck craned looking for the day when it will be set free from the chains of decay. This freedom will not come about until all of God's sons are revealed at the second coming of Christ. Its fall was linked to the fall of man and its freedom will be granted only through the eternal freedom of the saints. Until that point in time we can behold the decay of the world (yes, evolution is bunk), and can even hear it groan from its pains. Just as we look forward to shedding the body of this death and receiving our new body of glory, this world looks forward to Christ's return when the old will be burned and the new heavens and earth will come into existence.

8:23-25 – “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. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” – If it is true that the creation looks forward to the revelation of the sons of God, how much more do we eagerly anticipate that day! Generally, first fruits are offerings that are given to God, such as the first of the oil, grain, wool, etc. The giving of the first fruits to God communicates an understanding that everything belongs to Him. However, in this case, God has chosen to give us the first fruits of the Spirit. This doesn't mean that we have been given only a partial measure of the Spirit. Instead, the indwelling Spirit is a guarantee that the inheritance will someday fully belong to us – see Ephesians 1:13,14. Since we have been given the Holy Spirit, we have great confidence in regards to the return of Christ. Christians look forward to the final resurrection, because we have a pledge that we will be given a body of glory. Hence we groan because of the pain that must be endured in this realm and because of the hope for our future reward. It is important to notice that there is a sense in which we have already received the adoption as sons (vs 15-16), yet in another sense are still awaiting that adoption. As of now our bodies are still subject to death, so we must look forward to the public display of our position as sons of God. Thus when we speak of our salvation, there is still an aspect in which we look forward with great hope. Our souls have been saved by faith, but the salvation of our bodies will not happen until Christ's return. While the earlier part of Romans 8 has communicated that it is possible for the character of the Christian to be transformed into the likeness of Christ through the Spirit, the transformation of our bodies will take place only when Christ is revealed in His glorified body. With perseverance we eagerly expect that day.

ROMANS CHAPTER 8:26-39

(Conquering in Christ)

8:26-27 – “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; 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.” – The major point of the first section of Romans 8 is that spiritual life (now and eternally) is available only through the Holy Spirit. In the second major passage of Scripture in chapter 8 there was tremendous importance placed upon the Spirit being a guarantee of our hope of glory. In this final segment of the chapter, these two thoughts are tied together with emphasis upon the victory of the Christian by the power of the Spirit. The immediate context leading into verses 26 and 27 includes the thought of the Christian’s groaning for glory. Here the Scripture assures us that we are not alone in this longing. The Spirit, our pledge and hope of glory, cries out on our behalf. We see that the Spirit is indeed our helper, our copilot if you will. Because our hope of eternal glory has not yet been fully realized, there is an inherent weakness with being contained in a physical body. (As previously developed in chapters 6-8, this weakness is not referring to sin problems that a person cannot escape. This topic has been fully covered to establish that the Christian can have perfection of character with the help of the Holy Spirit.) The problem of a temporal house for our soul is that we are stuck in time. God is eternal and His Spirit is eternal so He is omniscient – He knows everything concerning this realm as well as that of the heavenly realm. However, we are limited in our knowledge both of the heavenly realm and of the future in the physical arena. The Scripture makes it clear that we will not have a full understanding of the glories of heaven until Christ’s return – see 1 John 3:2. But more in line with the context of this chapter is the fact that we don’t know the details of the future. As the old saying goes, “We don’t know what the future holds, but we do know Him Who holds the future.” Even the great apostle Paul didn’t know exactly what his future held when he was in prison, but he did know that it would turn out best for the Kingdom – see Philippians chapter 1. As a result of the limitations of space and time, we sometimes don’t know exactly what we should pray for. Thankfully the Spirit helps us in our prayers and God answers them for our good. From this passage of Scripture we also get to see the means by which the Spirit of God within us works in conjunction with the will of the Sovereign God upon His throne. While God is certainly a God of logic and reason, He also is a God of emotions. While Christ was in the flesh, we saw the emotions of God expressed within a human body. Christ expressed love with His tears during a discussion with Mary about the death of Lazarus. We caught a glimpse of His righteous anger when some refused compassion upon the man with the withered hand. Christ displayed appropriate jealousy when He ran the moneychangers out of the temple because zeal for His Father’s house consumed Him. In this passage of Romans 8, we see the emotion of the Holy Spirit as He intercedes from within us with “groanings too deep for words.” Yahweh is the eternal God with a personal interest. He searches the hearts of Christians and knows our minds. He also knows the mind of the Spirit for they are united. A great work of the Spirit in our lives is understanding our personal needs and placing those within the framework of God’s overall plan. Hence, if our motives are pure, we will ask God for things that are in accordance with His will and He will answer.

8:28 – “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.” – When the previous verses are properly understood, verse 28 falls perfectly into place. We have already seen that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. It has also been established that we are God’s children and His heirs. The Spirit is a guarantee of the future glory that will be given to us when we receive our heavenly bodies. Finally, we know that the Spirit intercedes for us when our physical limitations hinder us from knowing exactly what to pray for. Verse 28 is a tremendous summary of all these previous points – God has our best interest in mind in all things. From the immediate context as well as the context of the whole chapter, this verse makes a lot of sense. Although it is sometimes impossible for the Christian to know what circumstances would truly be best for him, God knows exactly what the Christian needs. *All things work together for good for the Christian.* All things that are obviously good are a gift from God for the benefit of our life with Him. Even the events in our lives that are filled with adversity are still divinely directed for our good. When we understand that the sovereign God rules the world in the interests of the Church, we can have great joy and confidence in the midst of trying circumstances – see James 1:2-4, Romans 5:3-5. As my dad likes to say, “When things are going wrong, they are really going right.” The God who takes notice of the takeoff and landing of sparrows is our Father who is intensely interested in taking care of our physical as well as our spiritual needs. This loving Father cares enough about us to administer “tough love” when we need it and to show mercy and compassion when that fits the bill. Of course all of the love and discipline is provided that we can have what is truly best – that we might share God’s holiness – see Hebrews 12:4-11. It is essential that we understand that the comfort granted by this verse is only applicable to the children of God. While God is always using circumstances, even trumpets of judgment, to turn sinners to Him, the sinners are not guaranteed of a good result. God doesn’t rule this world in the interests of sinners; He causes things to work for good for *those who love Him*. It is also important to notice that all of these things work out for good on our behalf because of God’s great purpose. Our Heavenly Father has a grand plan that He is carrying out throughout the universe. This plan will be fulfilled regardless of any individual’s response. Ultimately the focus is on God, not upon us. The only reason that we love God is because He first loved us. We have responded to God’s call because of His great purpose and choice. The individual still has free choice and responsibility, but God receives all the glory.

8:29-30 – “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; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” Just as the physical body obstructs the Christian’s view into the future, so also this temporal house makes it difficult to understand the power of the eternal God. The concept of eternity is incredibly hard to grasp because time is one of the most fundamental standards of our life. We use years, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds to schedule everything from our daily awakening to our time of retirement. Hence, it is no surprise that God’s eternal power and divine nature cause us to step back and consider these invisible attributes. Debates have raged for years concerning predestination vs. free will. Both sides of this argument

have Scriptures that they use to make their case. The only logical conclusion that can be made is that God both has foreknowledge and also allows humans to be free moral agents. In other words, while allowing every individual to make their own choices, God is able to know ahead of time what choices they will make. To us whose physical lives are governed by the parameters of time, this seems impossible. But for Yahweh, the Great I Am, there is no difficulty in beholding all of the events of history – past, present, and future, on a grand scale and at an individual level – right now. God has foreknowledge of His people and, therefore, has a great plan for them. God’s plan for those who are His is not simply for them to make it to heaven. God has foreordained – predestined if you will – that Christians be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. While there certainly is a final conformation when Christians receive a body in the likeness of Christ’s glorified body, there is also a present process by which the Christian is being changed into the image of Christ. Many passages speaking of spiritual transformation for the Christian are obviously speaking of present renewal – see Romans 12:2, Colossians 3:10, 2 Corinthians 3:18. The Christian has a part in this renewal, but the true transformation comes from God. Saints are really beginning eternity now as we are building our souls so that they will be appropriate for the body of glory. God’s eternal plan includes the Church taking on the very character of Christ. This is made clear by saying that God’s intention was for Christ to be the “firstborn among *many* brethren.” Jesus is pre-eminent – He has first place in all things, but we get to follow His example and be made like Him. Jesus brings His plan to completion as the Church is individually conformed to His likeness. Next we see the rest of the chain in our salvation. We already saw that those whom God foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ. Those who He predestined, He also called. In other words, God developed a means by which He would call those whom He knew would respond to the truth. God’s calling is done through Jesus Christ. As Jesus told Pontius Pilate, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Jesus communicated the same point in John 10 when He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” The next step after God’s calling through Christ is for us to be justified. As has been well established previously in the book of Romans, justification is also done through Christ. God has declared us righteous through the sacrifice of Christ in conjunction with our faith. The last link of this chain is glorification. When we receive our resurrected body, that glorification will be complete. So definite is our future glory that here in verse 30 it is spoken of as something that is already a reality. Isn’t it true that in a sense we have already been glorified with Christ? We have been raised with Christ, we’ve been seated with Him in the heavenly places, and we are being transformed from glory to glory. The promised future of glory has already begun to be realized through the glorification of the Firstborn Son. Right now, by faith, we reign with Christ from the throne.

8:31-32 – “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 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?” – What logical response should we have upon understanding that God makes everything work toward our eternal, spiritual good? If God is on our side, which He has proved that He is, then who is against us? We have nothing to fear; rather, our attitude should be confident and victorious. The rest of

chapter 8 is dedicated to driving home the tremendous victory that we have as Christians. The apostle Paul first shows that God is on our side by summarizing what He has done and continues to do for us. God pulled out all the stops in rescuing us from eternal punishment. He would not even hold back His own Son when there was no other way. As Isaiah 53:10 points out, “But the LORD was pleased to crush Him ...” for our sake. God delivered Christ over to unbearable punishment and spiritual separation in order that He might bring us all, both Jew and Gentile, back into fellowship with Him. What then will God spare in bringing us to perfection in Christ? The point is that God is willing to put all of His power behind us in developing our character. This point is equivalent to that made in Romans 5:9-10. If God was willing to sacrifice His Son while we were enemies, He does even more for us now that we are His friends. All things, physical and spiritual, are under the control of the Sovereign God for the benefit of His elect Church.

8:33-34 – “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; 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.” – In regards to the questions of charges and condemnation, the Holy Spirit answers with the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Before Christ’s trip to the earth, Satan had free access to the heavenly realm. When one reads the book of Job, it is obvious that the devil could come into God’s presence to perform the evil deeds consistent with his name. The word “devil” actually means “accuser,” or “slanderer.” Another example of Satan’s accusations in the Old Testament is given in Zechariah chapter 3. Therein is recorded a prophecy of the devil’s accusations against Jesus while He was bearing our sins. Even during Christ’s earthly sojourn, we find that Satan had obtained permission from God to sift Simon like wheat. Until Christ crushed the devil on the head through his death, resurrection, and exaltation, the adversary was busy accusing the saints. Christ’s death was the first step in shutting the mouth of the “accuser of the brethren.” Jesus’ death was the required sacrifice when Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the cross.” While Christ’s death on the cross was a great and absolutely necessary sacrifice, His High Priestly offering of the blood in heaven itself was a superior work. It was this offering in the true Holy of Holies that is called the “consummation of the ages.” In Christ’s ascension, He banished Satan forever from access to heaven, and made our position as God’s children eternally secure. Having been justified by Christ’s death, and saved by His life, there is absolutely no condemnation for the Christian. Who could possibly stand in God’s eternal courtroom and maintain that the Christian is guilty in any way? All of Satan’s past charges have been proven to be found false. The devil was guilty of contempt of court and has been forever cast out. Since we have such a great High Priest who has performed all these wonderful deeds for us, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace – Hebrews 4:14-16.

8:35 – “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” – The sufferings mentioned in this verse remind me of those hardships endured by the great men of faith as recounted in Hebrews chapter 11. The faithful men and women of the Old Testament encountered tremendous persecution even to the point of painful death on account of their belief in the Redeemer who was yet to come. They bore all of this adversity without ever

receiving the promised Holy Spirit. As Christians, we have received the promise of the Spirit by faith, so who could separate us from the love of Christ. When we consider Christ's love for us to endure the worst hostility by sinners against Himself, we should not get tired or give up – see Hebrews 12:3. As a matter of fact, we should understand that suffering for Christ cannot separate us from Christ, but rather makes us closer to Him. Paul speaks of “the fellowship of His sufferings” in Philippians 3:10. In Philippians 1:29-30, he says that it is “granted” to us that we get to suffer for Christ. Peter tells us to arm ourselves for suffering, “because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” We really need to understand that God does cause *all things* to work toward the purpose of us being conformed to the image of Christ. Outward pains, inward distress, persecution, economic struggles for food and clothing, danger of jail or physical pain, even death itself cannot break the bond of Christ's love for us.

8:36 – “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.’” – There is nothing new with the sufferings of God's people. As David felt in his day, so he wrote, not realizing that it was a prophetic statement of Christ's Church for the future. It is rather interesting that just as it was spoken of Jesus in Isaiah 53, “Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,” so in Psalm 44 it is written of His followers. As was mentioned earlier, if suffering was necessary for Christ, the older brother, to enter glory, so the younger siblings also must endure affliction. As Jesus said in John 15:20, “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” However, the Christian can rejoice in these tribulations, for Christ told us, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

8:37 – “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” – Christians don't let the troubles of this life separate them from God's love; on the contrary, we overwhelmingly conquer in all of these things. The most wonderful thing about our Savior is that He not only suffered beyond description, but He triumphed over the world. As a result of Christ's ultimate humility displayed at the cross, God highly exalted Him to glory far above every name that has ever been named. Jesus has truly conquered and has taken His rightful position on the throne. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Children of God who are being led by the Spirit not only follow Jesus to the cross, but also get to sit with Him on His throne. Listen to the thrust of Jesus' words in John 12:26, “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” In order for the Christian to joyfully endure the sufferings of this world, it is essential that his eyes be fixed on the full revelation of Jesus Christ seated in glory. If the picture of a person is that of a “dirty, rotten sinner,” then he is destined to be overcome by the world. However, the individual who faithfully sees the victorious risen Christ alive in him will overwhelmingly conquer this world. The proper mindset that was emphasized in the first part of this chapter results in eternal victory for the Christian. In tune with the whole book of Romans, this is not about works, but has everything to do with faith. As well described in 1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” Do you see yourself as a great

conqueror who reigns with Christ? For an awesome picture of the Conqueror and His resurrected army, see Revelation 19:11-16.

8:38-39 – “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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.” – Because of the example of Christ our forerunner, Paul was convinced that nothing could separate us from the love of God. There is an anchor for our soul from which nothing can shake us. The fear of death has been removed for the Christian, so death is not a problem for the Christian. Instead we look forward to the reward of a new body of glory that is ours after death. All of the snares of this life cannot deter the Christian, for we have confidence that God makes us stronger through the challenges that we encounter. Even all of the demonic influence of this world, whether it is through false religion or evil world governments, cannot touch the true Christian. The problems of earthly existence, whether they come today or tomorrow, are of no concern to the Christian who seeks first God’s Kingdom. Neither the forces from the skies above nor the earth beneath can daunt the Spirit-led person clothed with the armor of God. As a matter of fact, there is nothing whatever that the Christian can face that causes problems, for greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. God indeed causes *all things* to work for His purpose in the life of the Christian. Praise God!

ROMANS CHAPTER 9:1-5
(Paul's concern for physical Israel)

In the first half of the book of Romans, Paul really focused in on salvation for the individual. It was well established that faith is the only means of justification for anyone, whether Jew or Gentile. In the last half of the book, Paul turns his attention to the nation of Israel – first the physical nation, then the spiritual nation of Israel. The spiritual nation of Israel had always been of utmost concern to God, but to fully understand this, the purpose of physical Israel must first be recognized. Chapters 9-11 really show that God's character and plan has been consistent from the beginning of the physical nation, but that this plan would only be fulfilled in spiritual Israel, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. With this overall framework in place, we can make sense of the details as we study through the following verses.

9:1-2 – “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.” – Shortly Paul is going to point out the fact that the physical nation of Israel had for the most part rejected Christ in spite of their advantageous position. However, he first wants to communicate that he really has a great love for his countrymen. With full sincerity, he opens up his heart and shows the great sorrow that he has because of the lost condition of Israel. Because of his love for Christ combined with his love for his kinsmen, he is willing to tell the truth about his own emotions. Paul's conscience, which was guided by the Holy Spirit, bothered him about the separated state of those whom he held closest in his heart. He was not some cold-hearted preacher who enjoyed telling people of their deplorable condition. On the contrary, it tore him up when he thought of his physical nation's standing with God and this great love motivated him to tell the truth.

9:3 – “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,” – What is the value of one soul? Jesus put it well in Matthew 16:26, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” As a result of following in the footsteps of Christ, the great apostle Paul was a man who placed appropriate worth upon the eternal soul of each individual. These were not merely empty words of love, but were backed by the sacrifice of Paul's life. Here was a man who was willing to “spend and be expended” in hopes of saving the souls of others. After closing chapter 8 by saying that there was nothing that could separate him from the love of Christ, Paul here says that, although impossible, he would be willing to be separated for the sake of his countrymen. This reminds me of Moses who told God that he wanted his name blotted out of God's book if God would not forgive the sins of Israel. Even more, it makes me mindful of Christ, who experienced the greatest divorce of all when on the cross He was forsaken by God. Here we can see that Paul's drive for evangelism was motivated by his intense love for the lost. It is also worth noting that God allows each of us to be born into families, cities, states, countries, etc. in order that we might have special bonds with people and really desire their salvation.

9:4-5 – “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, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever, Amen.” As covered way back in chapter 3, those who were born in the nation of Israel certainly had an advantageous heritage. From the miraculous birth of Isaac and the special blessing that was granted to Jacob when his name was changed to Israel, God had particularly worked with the physical nation of Israel. Time and time again, they were called out and separated from the rest of the world by God’s wondrous works. Yet, like we see so often in the world today, most people who are blessed with special privileges squander them, and Israel was no exception. When God brought her out of Egypt, Israel was granted the great honor of adoption by God – see Exodus 4:22 and 19:5. She also was the only nation that was allowed to behold God’s glory – the divine radiance of God in the fire and in the cloud. The visible manifestation of the invisible God was shared with Israel both in her wanderings as well as in the tabernacle and temple. The special opportunity of beholding God’s glory even in a limited sense gave the Israelite nation glory and set her far above the nations. Israel’s exceptional heritage also consisted of the covenants – the affirmations of God’s special agreement with those who were descended from Abraham. As already dealt with in Romans 3, there was an advantage to circumcision. The physical mark that set Israel apart as God’s people should have been a reminder of the testament between God and the Israelites. Continuing on with the advantages of the Jews, Paul reminds them that they received the written Law from the mouth of God. This was not simply a code of justice such as that of Hammurabi, but was the very Law of God. Although the Law could not produce a people who could keep it, it was a huge privilege to recognize the standard of the Holy God. In addition to the previously mentioned items, the Jews also received the sacrificial system and the Levitical priesthood for the purpose of offering service to God. Apart from the pattern shown to Moses in God’s plans for the tabernacle, there was no opportunity for real service to God. While the sacrifices had to be administered through the priests, the common Israelite could participate in the sacrifices to God as communicated clearly in the communal feast of the peace offering. Again we see that the Israelite nation was truly set apart, for no other nation had the opportunity to render voluntary service to God. Continuing with the blessings of God upon physical Israel, Paul mentions the promises that were given to them. It would probably be possible to compile a list of tens or hundreds of promises that Israel had received from God. However, there are a few that are of particular importance. God specifically promised Abraham that the number of the sons of Israel would be like the sand of the sea. God had promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God had also spoken of the Promised Land that He would give to Israel. After kings were established in Israel, God had also promised that David’s descendants would be on the throne forever. Now, we understand from the New Testament that all of these promises were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His Church. However, we also recognize that there was fulfillment in the physical realm also of all of these spiritual promises – see Joshua 21:45. Paul also mentions the privilege of their ancestry. It has been truthfully noted that you cannot choose your relatives, particularly your ancestors. But who could possibly complain when your relatives were giants of the faith such as Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,

Joshua, Rahab, Deborah, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Micah, Malachi, etc. From the standpoint of role models, the nation of Israel was again without equal. Finally, the greatest privilege of all was that Jesus Himself came in the flesh as an Israelite to the Israelites. What an awesome privilege to have God be born in the flesh as your fellow countryman! In all of this Paul has been developing the point of his great grief that Israel as a nation, in spite of all these special privileges, has rejected Christ. In the following verses, explanation will be given concerning God's sovereign plan in all of this, as well as the condition of physical Israel and the true nation of Israel.

ROMANS CHAPTER 9:6-18

(God's sovereign plan)

9:6-8 – “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: ‘Through Isaac your descendants will be named.’ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.” – After describing his great anguish over his countrymen’s rejection of Christ, Paul is careful to add some clarifying remarks. There is no doubt that while Jesus carried out his earthly ministry, the majority of the Jews did not recognize that He was the Messiah. Even after His resurrection and ascension, it was a small percentage of the physical Israelites who acknowledged His authority as King of kings. But Paul wants his readers to understand that the problem was not with the word of God. In no manner had God’s word failed to accomplish its purpose – see Isaiah 55:10-11. The problem was with the recalcitrant Jews whose rebellion and desire to pursue righteousness in their own way caused them to stumble over the precious cornerstone. As a matter of fact, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul begins to establish that God’s promise had never been intended to be fulfilled in the entire physical nation of Israel, but only in true Israel. As he explains here, just because someone was a physical descendant of Jacob did not make him a part of the true family of Israel. In fact, he goes back a step further than Jacob to Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather. The Jews really regarded Abraham as the patriarch of their nation. So Paul makes his point by examining the descendants of Abraham. Abraham actually had many sons, but only one, Isaac, was the son of promise. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, as well as the sons of Keturah were born by fleshly means through concubines. On the other hand, Isaac was born by God’s miraculous working in the womb of Sarah. No good Jew would even claim to be brothers with the Ishmaelites or Midianites (one of Keturah’s sons was Midian). As a matter of fact, both of these groups were a thorn in the flesh of the nation of Israel for quite some time. The point is that Isaac was born by a special act of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the word spoken by God, while Abraham’s other sons were born from the flesh. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome who were of Jewish background of this historical information in order to communicate what it means to be a true son of Abraham and a true child of God. The next few verses will further emphasize this point.

9:9 – “For this is the word of promise: ‘At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.’” – Paul is really working on the fact that God is sovereign and has a plan that will be carried out. The fulfillment of this plan is not contingent upon man’s own efforts, but is guaranteed through the promised word of God. In the birth of Abraham’s son Isaac, there was nothing that Abraham could do on his own to complete God’s promise. As a matter of fact, Abraham’s futile attempts to “help God along” weren’t accepted by God at all. Previous promises were made to Abraham about a son who would be his heir, but this final promise is clear that the son of promise would be born through Sarah next year. The fact that Sarah was barren and was past the age of childbearing at 90 years old could not cause God’s promised word to fail. Instead, all of the physical impossibilities simply proved that the completed promise was the product of

God's sovereign power. Isaac was the heir, not because of the great effort of Abraham and Sarah, but because of God's promise. Thus Paul's point is well established that a person's physical lineage from Abraham doesn't make an individual a child of God. While chapter 9 doesn't particularly mention it, the responsibility of the individual is to believe the word of God. A person who is in good standing with God ultimately is dependent upon God's grace. This point is driven home in the following verses.

9:10-13 – “And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 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, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” – As was mentioned in passing earlier, the emphasis of Romans chapter 9 is on the sovereignty of God. It is important to remember that God's sovereignty is not challenged by the free will of man. When man tries to bring God down to his level, such attempts only create confusion. God's power is so abundantly superior to man's abilities that God can predetermine history, and yet have man exercise his own will in the process. This chapter of Romans establishes that God has a great plan that is being carried out through men in spite of their own desires. From the example of Isaac and Ishmael, it is possible to say that Isaac was chosen because Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman. But in the case of Jacob and Esau, both were sons of Isaac and Rebekah, and both were born at the same time. Yet before the twins were born, God had already said that the older would serve the younger. Before Jacob and Esau had done any good or evil, God had a purpose that would be fulfilled in accordance with His choice. Did God know ahead of time what the character of Jacob and Esau would be? Absolutely! Did God recognize that Esau would despise his birthright and that Jacob would stop at nothing to inherit the blessing? Of course He knew these things. God had good reason to love Jacob and hate Esau. Man's failure to be diligent causes him not to be chosen – see 2 Peter 1:10. But the emphasis here is that God's sovereign will ultimately is what counts in a person's honorable use in God's plan. Human responsibility is not canceled, but no one can say that a person has earned the right through his works to be chosen by God.

9:14-16 – “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” – The person who is still looking at things from a human perspective cannot comprehend God's ability of foreknowledge. Hence, he may begin to cry about the supposed injustice of God. The bottom line is that God has everything worked out so that man does not have to do God's job for Him. If we really want to cry out for justice apart from God's mercy, then not one individual would be worthy to be an honorable vessel for God. It was only because of God's mercy that we have the opportunity to be reconciled with God. Because of Christ's sacrifice, God is still just (payment was made for sin), but He is also the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ – see Romans 3:21-26. Jesus once told a parable that relates to the question at hand – see Matthew 20:1-16. Jesus speaks of those who were hired to labor in the vineyard for a denarius for a day's work. Many were hired at the

first hour of the work day, while others were hired at various points throughout the day. Some didn't even begin to work until the eleventh hour, the last hour of the day. Yet when they came to collect their wages, all were equally paid a denarius. Those who were hired first were miffed that the ones hired last were paid the same amount. The landowner gets to the heart of the problem when he asks, "... is your eye envious because I am generous?" In relation to the question here posed in Romans about God's justice, the real question is one of envy concerning God's generosity to others. So then we see again that salvation does not come from a person's hard work or intense will, but from God's grace. The point that was made in Romans 4:16 is that the individual's responsibility in all of this is faith, for true faith is consistent with acknowledging God's mercy, power, and grace.

9:17-18 – “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.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” – Here the apostle Paul shows the flip side of the point that he has been making. Not only does God's sovereignty cover those who are in accordance with His words of promise, but God also has full control over those who are disobedient to Him. The example presented here of Pharaoh is excellent for communicating God's rule over all. The Scripture that is here quoted of the Lord's words to Pharaoh through the mouthpiece of Moses was following the sixth plague on Egypt. Pharaoh had continually hardened his heart every time that relief came from God. In Exodus 9:15, the verse immediately preceding the quotation listed here in Romans, God made it clear that He could have wiped Pharaoh clean off of the earth. Yet God says that He allowed Pharaoh to remain in order to demonstrate His power in him, and that God's name would be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. Up until the sixth plague, Exodus speaks of Pharaoh hardening his heart, but afterwards it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Again we see that in no way is God unjust when He hardens those who have hardened themselves against the great Creator. As a result of Pharaoh's stubborn and rebellious attitude, God sent four more plagues upon the Egyptians. In so doing, the Israelites were set free from slavery, the Egyptian army was drowned in the depths of the Red Sea, and the surrounding nations feared Yahweh, the only true God. When God shows mercy, it is for His glory and for the sake of His great name. The same is true when He chooses to harden those whom He desires. It is important that we realize that the plan ultimately is to establish God's name everywhere. The point is not to nullify individual responsibility, but to emphasize that our will only counts when it is in subjection to God's will. It is not all about me, but all about God!

ROMANS CHAPTER 9:19-29

(God's mercy and wrath)

9:19 – “**You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’**” – Mankind has a really difficult time bowing to the absolute authority of God. There is a natural tendency to attempt to mold God to the “image of man” instead of submitting to God’s plan for us to be made in His image. Many Jews were really struggling with the question, “Why has God changed His mind, doing away with the Law, and letting the Gentiles in?” The purpose of Romans 9 is to answer that question and to help every individual come to grips with the fact that God’s will is sovereign. After previously establishing that God “has mercy on whom He desires” and “hardens whom He desires,” Paul now deals with a common argument from fleshly man. The question really boils down to this: “Why does God hold people accountable when He uses them, either with their willing cooperation or against their will, to accomplish His desire?” Again the real problem with this objection is fleshly man’s inability to comprehend the fact that God’s sovereignty does not negate man’s free choice – see Luke 22:22.

9:20-21 – “**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? 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?’**” – It is interesting that man shrinks back from personal accountability but is so quick to desire to cross-examine God. Bertrand Russell, a well-known atheist who has passed on to his reward, used to boast that if there was a God, and if there was such a thing as judgment day, that he was prepared to call God to account. Russell bragged that if God asked him why he hadn’t believed in God, he would respond that it was because of “a lack of evidence.” In actuality, there is no doubt that Bertrand Russell will find himself speechless in the presence of Him from whom “heaven and earth fled away.” The Old Testament book of Job also gives insight into Job’s wishing to question God about His ways. Chapters 38-41 consist of a long line of God’s questions to Job establishing that Job has no place to question or instruct God. At the conclusion of these unanswerable questions, Job tells God, “... I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.” When brought face to face with God, no man has a place to question His ways. In one sense, the point is very simple: If a potter has the right to make out of the same lump of clay an honorable vessel and a dishonorable one, then God certainly has the right, out of the same mass of humans who by their own sins have sunk into the depths of despair, to exalt some to eternal life while leaving others to continue to plunge downward into hell. Of course we understand from the rest of the book of Romans as well as Scripture taken as a whole that God’s means of choosing is not arbitrary, but the idea presented here is that God’s hardening or showing of mercy does not conflict with His justice.

9:22-24 – “**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? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not**

from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” – Again we see that there is no doubt that God has a plan to completely manifest His power. On judgment day, God’s power will be fully understood by all when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. However, in the meantime, God is incredibly patient as He gives tremendous opportunities for the wicked to repent. We understand from Ezekiel 18:23,32 that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He reaffirms this under the New Covenant when He says in 2 Peter 3:9 that He is “not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.” It is so important to recognize that God’s mercy is such a strong characteristic that He withholds His righteous wrath in order to make sure that there is full opportunity for the vessels of mercy to receive the riches of His glory. Before we emphasize the positive plan that God has for His saints, there are some points worth observing. First of all, there are people who are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Paul has just used Pharaoh as an example of such a vessel. (As a sidenote, according to Ephesians 2:3, isn’t it true that once we too were children of wrath). Who has prepared such people for destruction? Really there are three active agents in this path leading to eternal punishment. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 brings out that God, Satan, and the individual all have a part in this. God uses Satan to delude those “who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” Although God prepares those who are impenitent for destruction, we find that He is completely just in sending the unrighteous to everlasting judgment. Now let us get back to the point of God’s patience in bringing about this eternal judgment. We may often feel like those souls in Revelation who cry out to God asking Him, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” – Revelation 6:10. However, the answer from the Scripture is that God withholds His wrath in order that His chosen ones may receive glory. Just as there was a clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites when God was hardening Pharaoh, so there is an eternal distinction between those who are hardened and those who receive God’s mercy. While those who are reprobate get to drink the wine of God’s wrath in full strength, the faithful get to share in the riches of the perfect, holy, and righteous God. As a matter of fact, in the same way that God prepared the dishonorable vessels to carry out His will, even more God has prepared the honorable vessels to partake in His glory – see Romans 8:28-30. Paul closes these verses by communicating that the remnant that God has so mercifully prepared for glory (the circumcised of heart that make up spiritual Israel) consists of both Jews and Gentiles.

9:25-26 – “As He says also in Hosea, ‘I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ and her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’ ‘And it shall be in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they shall be called sons of the living God.’” – The book of Hosea is a great representation of God’s dealings with His people. God told the prophet Hosea to go and take a harlot named Gomer to be his wife. Gomer bore three children to Hosea, the last two being a daughter named Lo-ruhamah (she has not obtained compassion), and a son named Lo-ammi (not my people). Although Gomer proved to be unfaithful, God told Hosea to buy her back from the slavery that she had sunk to in her immorality. This relationship between Hosea and his unfaithful wife is symbolic of the relationship between God and Israel. The physical nation of Israel had proven herself to be an adulteress, hence God no longer would claim

her as His people nor would He show her any more compassion. However, God prophesied that at some point in the future, He would once again call her His people and His beloved. Simply viewing this prophecy from the Old Testament would lead a person to believe that once again the physical nation of Israel would be considered God's people. But when the Old Testament is viewed through the eyes of the New Testament apostles and prophets, the full meaning is explained. Both Paul here in Romans as well as Peter in 1 Peter 2:10 relate this prophecy to the Church of the living God consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. We see that, consistent with the context of Romans 9 and the book as a whole, God's sovereign will includes His showering of mercy upon those who were once sinners and separated from Him. Thus, we find that spiritual Israel is not made up solely of believing Jews, but as foretold in the Old Testament, of the faithful among the nations also.

9:27-28 – “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; for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly.’” – It is important to note that the same Old Testament which prophesied the acceptance of the Gentiles also predicted that the majority of the sons of Israel would be destroyed. While this prophecy of Isaiah had immediate fulfillment in the swallowing up of Israel by the Assyrians, the real execution of God's word had to do with only a remnant of the Jews becoming Christians. The majority of Israel was lost due to their captivity by the Assyrians; as the years progressed, only a remnant of the nation was left as it was dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire. In the full realization of this thought, the majority of Jews rejected Christ and therefore they have been left to perish along with the pagans who have refused to acknowledge the true God. Paul also points us to the fact that true salvation isn't about deliverance from a physical enemy, but is about eternal freedom from the bondage of Satan. God never intended for His plan to be completed in those who were of a particular lineage, rather, He has desired to fulfill His purpose in the remnant who believe His word.

9:29 – “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.’” – Again we see the point that God's will is being carried out. God should receive the glory for leaving a remnant of Israelites who would believe in Christ. Remember that Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to destruction because of their absolute wickedness. Yet when God first revealed to Abraham that He was about to destroy those cities, Abraham pled with God concerning that judgment. As a result of Abraham's discussion with God, it was agreed that God would not destroy Sodom if there were only 10 righteous people in the city. We know that not even 10 were found, so Sodom and Gomorrah went up in flames, and even the wife of Lot, Abraham's nephew, was turned into a pillar of salt when she refused to obey the instructions of the angels. The point that is here made in Romans is that the same could have happened to the physical nation of Israel was it not for the small seed left that believed in Christ. God's sovereign mercy is still in effect so that Israel's rejection was not total. The final verses of this chapter will summarize the reason that Gentiles could now be accepted and why the majority of Israel was rejected.

ROMANS CHAPTER 9:30-33

(Righteousness by faith)

9:30-31 – “What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.” – While often Paul uses the terminology, “what shall we say then?” to bring up an anticipated objection, here he uses this phrase to ask what the logical conclusion is of the preceding thoughts of chapter 9. The bottom line is that the Gentiles were much more ready to embrace Christianity than were the Jews. It seems as if the opposite should have been true; the Jews had all of the Old Testament background setting the stage for the coming Christ, while the nations had been stumbling around in paganism for millennium. But just as Jesus repetitively foretold, “the last shall be first, and the first last.” The Gentiles (the “last” of Jesus’ parables) ended up attaining righteousness, while the Jews (the “first” in the parables) did not realize that righteousness. Because many of the Gentiles had no real disillusionment with being able to reach God by their own means, they were quick to joyfully receive the truth of the message that Christ would reconcile them to God. Although they had not actively pursued righteousness, when they understood the truth that Jesus is Lord, they clutched the gospel with faith and had righteousness credited to them. On the other hand, the Jews had continually chased that elusive law of righteousness only to be disappointed time and time again. Why could they not arrive at that law of righteousness? The next couple of verses tell all.

9:32-33 – “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 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.’” – Why, in spite of all their efforts, could the Jews not attain righteousness? In summary, the reason that righteousness was impossible for the Jews was because the approach was wrongheaded. As a whole, the attempt of the Jews to meet the requirements of the Law was by means of the Law. Their focus was completely wrong; instead of focusing on God’s glory, they kept staring into the deathly decrees that declared the debt of their sin. No matter how hard they worked, this debt could not be removed. Contrarily, the greater the effort by works, the more power sin gained through the Law, and the farther the distance to God. Looking at this issue from another angle, they did not pursue it by faith. Now what exactly does the statement mean that “they did not pursue it by faith”? As previously developed in the book of Romans, true faith is belief in the words of God. To have faith means to grasp on to the picture that has been revealed by God. For Noah, that picture was a really big boat that would be a means of physical salvation. Noah had to believe that the God who would destroy the world by water would call into being a new world by that same water. For Abraham, that picture was that he would be a father of many nations. Abraham had to see that God would take a dead womb and miraculously supply life. When tested, Abraham had to believe that God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise concerning Abraham’s descendants. Job had to believe that there was a Redeemer who could raise his dead body from the ash heap and supply it with real life. Rahab had to have faith that He who tore down the walls of Jericho would sustain her family and make it a great

house in Israel. All of the great men and women of faith in the Old Testament saw with their spiritual eyes the reality of that which God had promised. All of the examples of faith in the Old Testament ultimately pointed to the resurrection and ascension of the Christ. But what was it that the entire Israelite nation was supposed to be looking for? They should have been searching for the Messiah, but when He came they did not even recognize Him. Paul equates their unbelief with stumbling over the stumbling stone. In order to understand the significance of this stone in the discussion of faith and works, we must journey back to the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon. Both the tabernacle and the temple were to be constructed in accordance with the pattern given from God. It is interesting to note that the blueprint of the temple was so precise that every stone was to be cut away from the site and yet everything fit without alteration upon construction. One of the traditions that have been passed down from the temple of Solomon's day was of a stone that seemed to be out of shape. Since no modification of stones was allowed at the temple site, the stone was set aside. The problem was this out-of-place stone kept getting in the way of the workers as they stumbled over it or carried things around it. However, at some key juncture, this unusual stone ended up being the key stone of the whole temple. Applying this lesson of the physical temple to the spiritual building desired by God, our eyes are opened to the most important block of God's whole plan. While Jesus was on earth, He knew that the majority of the Jews would reject Him. As the time of His earthly life neared its completion, He told a parable about a vineyard to the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees in Matthew chapter 21. In this parable, Jesus spoke of some foolish vine-growers who refused to give the landowner His proper proceeds. At the end of the parable Jesus quotes from Psalm 118 concerning the stone which was rejected by the builders but which became the chief corner stone. In no uncertain terms, Jesus applies this Scripture to the Jews and tells them that because of their rejection of the Rock, the kingdom is going to be taken away and given to another nation that would bear fruit. Obviously Jesus is this precious cornerstone rejected by the Jews, but why the rejection? Again we see that the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Christ was because their focus was wrong. The cornerstone *seemed* to be the wrong shape to those who were looking for a physical king who would grant physical deliverance from the Romans. Peter addressed this issue with the leaders of Israel in Acts 4:11-12 when he establishes that the stone which they rejected is the only means of true salvation. But it wasn't just the rulers who missed the picture presented by God. The god of this world has indeed "blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." The Jewish nation as a whole shouted "Hosanna" in the streets when Jesus rode as King into Jerusalem, but they gave up on Him when the Romans nailed Him to a tree. The overwhelming majority never even *saw* Him when He really came in the name of the Lord; they missed the importance of the cornerstone – see Psalm 118: 22-26, Matthew 23:39. The actual laying of the cornerstone into place occurred at the ascension of Christ to the throne. Those who disbelieve stumble over this heavenly cornerstone because they are disobedient to the word – see 1 Peter 2:7-8. Once again Jesus foretold this stumbling in a discussion with His disciples in John 6:61-62 when He asked, "Does this [being the bread which came out of heaven] cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" Looking at Christ as the One who has ascended into heaven is a major stumbling block for those with a physical mindset. It was difficult for the Jews of Paul's day to believe in

Jesus because of their preconceived notion of the Messiah. It is difficult for the “religious” of our day to develop real faith because of a physical view of Jesus. Almost everyone continues to trip and fall over this heavenly cornerstone. But those who have faith are not disappointed when they see Christ in the realm of the unseen – then the precious value of the *living* stone is understood by those who believe – see 1 Peter 2:4-6. In a fitting summary of Romans chapter 9, those who insist upon following their own wills and desires will be crushed by the stone and will be “scattered like dust.” All those who think that they can achieve righteousness by their own means are destined to be used by God as vessels for dishonor. However, those who “fall on the stone” and are “broken in pieces” will be vessels for honor. In line with the whole theme of the book of Romans, the righteous man shall live by faith. Not just any dream will do; not just any faith picture will work; the key is to fix our eyes on the living Christ who has been placed as the cornerstone of the real temple. As pointed out in Ephesians chapter 2, the living temple consists of the faithful among both Jews and Gentiles: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Don’t trip on the beautiful faith picture given by God – if you believe, you will not be disappointed.

ROMANS CHAPTER 10:1-13

(Jesus is Lord)

10:1-2 – “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” – At this juncture of Paul’s discussion concerning the Jews’ rejection of Christ and hence, God’s rejection of them, Paul returns to the fact of his great love for his kinsmen. Paul was not enjoying “kicking them while they were down,” but was laying out the truth in hopes of their salvation. Paul’s earnest desire from his heart was that his fellow Israelites would be saved. Here is a man that was fully cognizant of the fires of hell and did not wish for anyone to undergo that eternal separation from the Almighty. Paul didn’t only wish for the salvation of the Jews, but his earnest desire was manifested in his prayers for them. True care and concern for the lost is communicated through prayers on their behalf, and Paul certainly backed up his talk of love with his devotion to prayer. In his discussion of the Jews’ need for salvation, Paul acknowledges their zeal for God. However, zeal for God if not in accordance with knowledge is not enough to grant salvation. God has always expected His people to understand that which He has required through His revelation – ignorance is not bliss. There is a very important Scriptural principle that is here mentioned – lack of knowledge leads to slavery and rejection from God – see Hosea 4:6, John 8:31-32. Although no one could question the intentions and zeal of many of the Israelites, the fact that they were not obedient to the truth kept them separated from God. In the same way today, many religious groups ranging from the Baptists to the Mormons and from the Muslims to the Hindus have great zeal for their false beliefs. Their futile attempts to please God in their own way are not acceptable to God, so we too must pray for their salvation.

10:3-5 – “For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.” – We find that the real problem is that which was mentioned at the end of chapter 9. Because the Jew did not understand God’s means for producing righteousness, he was in hot pursuit of the wrong thing on the incorrect path. Israel was attempting to chart their own course to their own righteousness and ended up on the path of law. The problem with attempting to be justified by law is that the requirement is absolute conformity every minute of every day. When the law has been broken, there is only one way to turn – that is to Christ. However, if a person refuses to understand the justification granted through true faith in Christ, he has no alternative other than to be his own standard. As covered in chapter 4, attempts at self-justification are equivalent to grand-scale accounting fraud attempting to hide an insurmountable debt. A person who attempts to be justified by works, that is, to earn his wage by keeping the law, finds himself so far in the red that bankruptcy is the only option. Certainly the nation of Israel was spiritually bankrupt because they could not practice the righteousness based on law. However, Christ was able to perfectly keep the demands of the law – of course He was able to achieve that standard by faith – see Hebrews 12:2. Christ is indeed the One who is the fulfillment of the Law. Therefore, He is the end of the law (the goal, if you will)

for righteousness to everyone who believes. In complete consistency with the rest of Scripture, the purpose of the law was not for it to bring fulfillment, but to lead us to Christ – see Galatians 3:24. Therefore there is no longer a need for a person to attempt to be justified by law (to live by that righteousness), but instead he should get on the path left by Christ. The great reward for the faithful individual is twofold – 1) he is declared righteous by his faith in Christ, and 2) he can now, with the help of Christ, fulfill the righteous requirement of the law by being led by the Spirit rather than the flesh.

10:6-7 – “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), or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” – There is no doubt that Jesus Christ our Lord kept the Law perfectly. In the words of Hebrews 4:15, He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” But just as definite in the record of the holy writ is that no one else has been able to keep the Law. As succinctly explained in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Verse 5 of Romans 10 clearly communicated that which was spoken by Moses, “He who practices them [the requirements of the Law] shall live by them” – see Galatians 3:12, Leviticus 18:5. As has been well established previously in the book of Romans, no man can fulfill the Law through his efforts to practice them. In sharp contrast, we find that the righteousness based on faith takes quite a different approach (this also was spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:12-14). The point of this passage is that Christ has already accomplished the really difficult work in regards to righteousness. Anyone who truly desires to be righteous must put his faith in that work that only God can do. The Jew of Paul’s day had to come to the same understanding necessary for the religious man of our day – turn from the glory of prideful accomplishments and from the peer pressure to accept man’s traditions and turn to the ascended Christ. Any individual who refuses to be obedient to the words of the resurrected Christ is in effect saying that he doesn’t need Christ. This person might as well attempt to ascend into heaven to give Christ an escort to earth or descend into Hades to snap the bonds of death and raise Christ from the dead. When Jesus was still walking in the flesh, He clearly stated that only He could perform the work necessary for salvation when He said in John 3:13, “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.” Exactly the same point is made in Ephesians 4:9-10. Any person in pursuit of the righteousness of God must stop making futile attempts to earn the way to salvation. Instead, the means of righteousness is by faith – to see the One who is unseen – that is, to clearly view by faith the ascended Christ who rules this world in the interests of His saints. A failure to understand the significance of Christ’s ascension leaves no option but for the individual to either pursue righteousness by means of law or to give up on righteousness altogether. However, the righteous man gets to live by faith.

10:8 – “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,” – Here the apostle Paul continues his quotation from Deuteronomy 30. Righteousness by faith not only tells a person what not to say (that is, to avoid the attitude of works), but it also has a positive proclamation. We find that the word of faith is not difficult, but it is simple; it is not so far away that no one can possibly reach it, but it is very close. The word of faith as

recorded in both the Old and New Testaments says that it is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. The word that saves is the word of faith and it demands not a tremendous amount of work, but true faith that results in obedience. The next couple of verses expound upon this position.

10:9-10 – “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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” – In the days of the first century church, there was no confusion as to the place of immersion in salvation. Paul has already heavily hammered on the connection between faith and immersion in Romans chapter 6, so they understood that if a person really believed in the resurrection of Christ, he would promptly be immersed in order that he could faithfully participate in that resurrection. However, the Christians of Jewish background were still having a difficult time with the concept of God’s mercy being showered on the Gentiles also. So Paul is proving from the Jews’ Old Testament that God has not changed His mind, but it was always His plan to save all who would have faith. Thus he gives the O.T. quotation, “The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart.” (As a sidenote, this is very similar to the terminology that Paul used in his discussion with the Gentiles at the Areopagus when he reminded them that the true God is not far from each of us.) Here Paul develops the part of the gospel that directly ties in with this quote from Deuteronomy. First, the Holy Spirit emphasizes the necessity of the good confession. According to the Scripture, the statement that Jesus is Lord means understanding that Jesus is both Christ and Yahweh. When Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Jews pushed the charge that He made Himself out to be a king. When Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king, Jesus answered affirmatively that He was King of a spiritual realm. Ultimately it was this confession of His Kingship before Pilate that guaranteed His death by crucifixion. Earlier when the Sanhedrin tried Jesus, His response that He was indeed the Son of God was the testimony that sealed His fate. This two-pronged confession of Jesus is required of Christ’s followers even if it means that we too lay down our lives as a result. Of course this verbal confession flows from the belief in our heart that Jesus has in fact been raised from the dead. Modern mainline denominational “Christianity” (congregations that are affiliated with such groups as the National Council of Churches or World Council of Churches) is akin to the Sadducees of the first century. The Sadducees had built an intellectual shell that forced them to dismiss the teachings of a majority of the Old Testament. Their disbelief in angels, demons, or the resurrection is similar to the church people of today who don’t believe in the devil or in the physical resurrection of Christ. These nonbelievers need to drop their stubborn resistance to the truth and acknowledge the proof of the resurrection and the infallibility of the Scripture before they can be saved. On the other hand, the “fundamental evangelicals” of our day are strikingly similar to the Pharisees who claimed to believe the Scriptures but made it of no effect by giving precedence to their traditions. Most so-called Christians of today are just like the Jews in that they follow a Messiah of their own imagination. Premillennialists who are still waiting for Christ to come back in the flesh and set up a physical kingdom need to quit stumbling over the rock of offense and believe in the ascended King. Those who improperly believe that they can ask Jesus into their heart in accordance with their traditions need to stop equating faith with the “any dream

will do” mentality portrayed in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. These nonbelievers need to discontinue attempting to tell the Coach how to choose His team, and “fall on the stone” and have their wills broken to that of the Rock. This is not difficult nor is it a salvation by works – no one has to bring Christ down or raise Him up, they simply have to believe in His resurrection and have a part in it by adopting the faith picture given by God through immersion. Through a humble faith that subjects itself to the faith picture given by God, a person confesses that Jesus is Lord, and is granted salvation.

10:11 – “For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’” – Just as at the end of chapter 9, Paul again quotes from Isaiah 28:16 but here only mentions the last part of the verse. In chapter 9, the major emphasis was upon the corner stone being a rock of offense to the unbelieving, while this time the stress is placed upon the reward given to those who believe. Paul is emphatic that *whoever* believes in Christ will not be disappointed or ashamed. The literal translation from the Hebrew in Isaiah 28:16 says that he who believes in Christ will not be in a hurry. The idea is that the faithful person has nothing to worry about, either now or for eternity. True faith brings about justification, which results in peace toward God and a great confidence. Everyone who clings to his foolish pride will shrink back in shame at the return of Christ for judgment, but as Habakkuk 2:4 says, “The righteous man shall live by faith” – see Hebrews 10:37-39. There is no expression for the incredible joy that will come from the faithful confidence of the Christian before the great white throne.

10:12-13 – “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” – In the previous verse, the Holy Spirit was very definite in saying *whoever* believes in Christ will not be disappointed. Paul continually emphasizes the fact that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek in the book of Romans as well as his other letters. It was very difficult for the Jew to realize that his heritage meant nothing in terms of his standing with God. God shows no partiality; His favor is abundantly given to every Christian, regardless of an individual’s past. There are still many today that mistakenly view the Jews as God’s chosen people, but the New Testament is clear that is not the case. God’s chosen people consist of the faithful from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation – see Revelation 5:9. As Peter found out when He was sent to preach to Cornelius (the first Gentile who became a Christian), “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” – Acts 10:34-35. Here in Romans, the same point is made that the Lord will richly bless *all* who call on Him. The Old Testament quotation here used by Paul comes from the second chapter of Joel where Joel prophesied the coming of the New Covenant. This same passage was used by Peter to kick off his message on the day of Pentecost to communicate the terms of salvation under the New Testament. From the Old Testament, God made it clear that the salvation granted through Christ would be for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The stipulation given by God is that one really believes or, in different terminology, that one calls on the name of the Lord. What is the Scriptural call? This question will be answered in the next section of verses.

ROMANS CHAPTER 10:14-21
(Faith comes by hearing the Word)

10:14-15 – “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? 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.’” –

So many religious people of our day attempt to establish that a person can be saved just by praying by giving the Scriptural quote that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. While the Scripture most definitely makes that statement, this in no way implies that a simple prayer can save a person from judgment. There are two absolutely essential details if a person desires to “get ahold of” another individual. Firstly, they must know whom they intend to reach. As an illustration of this point, allow me to tell of a salesman who called at dinner time. He asked to speak with a “Miss Julie Wilson.” I promptly informed him that there was no such person living at this residence. I figured that if someone who didn’t even know my wife well enough to know her proper name was calling for her, then he shouldn’t get to speak with her. In the same way, no person can call on the Lord if they haven’t believed in Him enough to know His proper name. When the Scripture demands that a person confess that Jesus is Lord, it is very important that we comprehend the meaning of this statement. As Joel looks forward to the New Covenant, he says in chapter 2:32, “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD [Yahweh] will be delivered.” It is imperative that we understand the Son of God is the Eternal Father. Jesus on the throne is One God. We need to recognize this when we make the good confession. Secondly, if a person desires to contact another individual, he must have the correct listing of the telephone number. If someone calls my house asking for someone I’ve never met, I inform him that he must have the wrong number. In the same manner, if we expect to get in touch with the King, we had better know His number and the proper protocol for speaking with Him. A verbal call by a sinner will never reach the throne room of glory – see Isaiah 59:1-2. As a matter of fact, the inspired record of Saul’s conversion helps us see how a person shall call. When Saul understood on the Damascus road that he was speaking with the risen Christ, he cried out, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). If there was ever a verbal call that could save, then Saul should have been saved at that point. Was he saved on the Damascus road? The Scripture emphatically proves that although he believed in the risen Christ, had repented from his past sins, and verbally called on the name of the Lord, he was not saved. Three days later Ananias, with full authority from Jesus, told him, “Get up and be immersed, and wash away your sins, *calling* on His name.” Saul’s sins were not washed away until he called on the name of the Lord in immersion. The fact that any individual must be immersed in order to call on the name of the Lord is further established in 1 Peter 3:21, “Corresponding to that [the events of Noah’s Flood], immersion now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh – but an *appeal* to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It is in immersion that a person makes a legal inquiry to God for a clean conscience. As a final cross-check to our conclusion that a person calls on the name of the Lord through immersion, examine Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Peter quotes from Joel 2:32 (And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved) at the beginning of his message. When

the people are pierced to the heart and ask what they should do, Peter responds in Acts 2:38 with, “Repent, and each of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” A person calls on the name of the Lord by being immersed in His name for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now that we’ve answered the question of how a person calls on the name of the Lord, let us look at the other points of these verses. The first question asks how a person can call upon Him in whom he has not believed. The obvious answer is: he won’t. As was previously mentioned, in order for the faithful call to be made in immersion, the individual must believe that Jesus is indeed Lord and Christ. The next query in this chain of questions asks how people can believe in Him whom they have not heard. Again there is a clear answer; they can’t. This is an important principle from Scripture – a person cannot have faith apart from knowledge. The whole concept of blind faith is in direct opposition to the tenth chapter of Romans. The third question begs how people can hear without a preacher. The resounding response is: they don’t. As in the example of the Philippian jailer (and many other cases in the book of Acts), belief in Christ follows hearing the message preached. The opportunity for salvation comes only through the foolishness of preaching – see 1 Corinthians 1:21. There is certainly a great need for Christians who are willing to preach to the hungry ear. So the final question asks how they can preach without being sent. Again the point is that preachers must be commissioned. Ultimately the charge to preach came from Jesus Himself in the Great Commission, but we’d better do our part to continue to send preachers to the lost and dying souls. Some important aspects of this commission include: 1) equipping the individual Christian to preach the word as they go, 2) developing the zeal and purpose in the hearts of men who will dedicate themselves fully to preaching the word, 3) support with prayer and financing those who have proven their commitment to preach regardless of the sacrifice, and 4) develop true shepherds of the flock who are willing to work hard at preaching and teaching within the local congregation. The feet of those who bring good news of freedom from Satan’s captivity are truly beautiful no matter how dirty, smelly, or bunion-covered they may be. Let us pray and work that the Lord’s mighty army be full of beautiful feet.

10:16-17 – “However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” – As was the case with the Jews of the first century, so it is with men and women today. Regardless of the overwhelming evidence for the risen Christ, most people refuse to listen to the glad message. They prefer to pursue their own desires rather than to heed the glad tidings of good things. It is important to note that the problem is not with the message nor with the messenger, but with the sinner who refuses to obey the message in faith. Many complain that the message is overly negative, but how can the fact that Christ paid for our sins be construed to be a negative message? As Isaiah foretold in chapter 53 the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow, he also prophesied in verse 1 that the majority would not believe the report of this good news. The fact is well stated that faith can only be developed through hearing by the word of Christ. The real problem here is that most people refuse to actually *hear* the message. As Jesus emphasized on numerous occasions, he who has ears to hear had better listen up. While God certainly puts responsibility on the messenger to carry the gospel

throughout the whole world, He puts the final accountability upon the hearer. Ignorance is not bliss; every individual will be called to task for his unwillingness to hear and obey the message.

10:18 – “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.’” – This argument by the Jews of Paul’s day is very familiar in our own time. How many an individual has attempted to avoid personal accountability to faithfully obey the gospel by hiding under the cloak of a hypothetical situation! Personally, I have heard numerous disputes over such Scriptures as Acts 2:38 or 2 Thessalonians 1:8 come in the form of “what about those who have never heard?” or “surely someone who was in a foxhole wouldn’t go to hell because he wasn’t immersed.” God answers these objections by putting full responsibility back upon the individual to hear His words. The verse from Psalm 19 that is here quoted by Paul has as its original thrust the fact that God’s Creation shouts of His existence so that there is no individual who has not heard this message. However, Paul uses this passage to make a point that is just as substantiated: what God first spoke clearly through His creation, He has now revealed more fully through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ from the dead. The message of Christ’s resurrection has been heard worldwide since the first century – see Colossians 1:6, Acts 17:6. Surely some societies and cultures have suppressed the truth to the point that it is difficult to uncover, but every individual needs to pursue truth until he finds it. Certainly in America, the Bible is readily available to anyone who is willing to read it, and those who refuse to heed the good news under the guise of compassion for those who have never heard will pay the penalty of eternal destruction. Had the Jews had ample opportunity to hear the message? Indeed they did, just as God is giving people in our day every occasion to hear His word that they may respond in faith.

10:19-21 – “But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you.’ And Isaiah is very bold and says, ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’ But as for Israel He says, ‘All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.’” – Now the person refusing to submit to the gospel turns his argument to the question of understanding. Maybe, he maintains, all have heard, but certainly they didn’t understand, did they? In other words, he is questioning if people can be held responsible for a lack of faith in something they never completely understood. The Holy Spirit’s answer through the mouth of Paul establishes that any lack of understanding is not from ignorance but from unwillingness to know – see Hosea 4:6. Just as Hebrews 4:12 communicates, the Word of God is not an I. Q. test, but an integrity test. Paul establishes that even the Gentiles, who had never glimpsed the foreshadows or received all of the extra teaching, could figure it out. That vineyard which Israel had neglected was handed over to the Gentiles in accordance with prophecy from both Moses and Isaiah. The fact that the Gentiles had not actively sought God but found Him shows that there was no excuse for the nation of Israel. In accordance with Romans 9, God’s sovereign plan to extend salvation to the Gentiles would be carried out, but the Gentiles’ opportunity came as a result of Israel’s rebellion. It is essential to understand that God’s

judgment on Israel was not arbitrary; they deserved it in full. God had time and time again shown mercy and extended His lovingkindness to Israel, but the majority of Jews had proven themselves to be obstinate and disobedient. As will be further communicated in chapter 11, God has not rejected the whole nation of Israel, but only those who have rejected Him. Along the same lines, chapter 11 shows that as long as a person is alive, he still has opportunity to turn back to God and faithfully come into His good graces. Looking back on the Jews' rejection of Jesus Christ, it is easy to wonder at their lack of faith. But we must make sure that we are not so foolish. Let us always heed the glad tidings!

ROMANS CHAPTER 11:1-10
(The condition of physical Israel)

11:1 – “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.” –

Throughout the book of Romans, the apostle Paul strongly established some points that were difficult for the Jewish Christian to swallow. From the first few chapters, the point was made that both Jew and Gentile were in trouble with God, but that the gospel had power to save both of them. Chapters 3-5 really drove home the fact that justification comes by faith in Christ, not by the Law. In chapters 6-8, the Holy Spirit painted the beautiful faith picture for the individual Christian of the death of the old man and the resurrection of a Spirit-led new creature. Finally, the last couple of chapters have shown that God’s sovereign plan includes mercy upon whom God desires and hardening to whom He desires. It has been proven that God’s mercy is available to anyone who will believe, confess, and call on the Lord in immersion. However, the facts are that the Jews have mostly stumbled over the “rock of offense” and that there is no excuse for this disobedience. In this setting, the question arises concerning God’s rejection of Israel. It is easy to think that God has discarded Israel altogether in favor of the Gentiles. In response to this question of possible rejection of the Israelites by God, Paul uses his own situation to help clear things up. Paul himself was an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, yet God had willingly accepted him. If God could accept Paul, He could accept any Israelite. God did not have a problem with every Jew, but with fleshly Israel who had obstinately rejected Christ.

11:2-4 – “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? ‘Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.’ But what is the divine response to him? ‘I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’” –

Paul again emphasizes that God has not rejected the faithful Israelites whom He foreknew. In fully establishing this point, he turns back to the example of Elijah in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab not only walked in the idolatry of Jeroboam but also erected an altar for Baal and the Asherah. As a result of the open idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel, God told Elijah to predict to Ahab that there would be drought upon the land. After three and a half years without rain, Elijah dared the prophets of Baal and the Asherah to meet him at Mount Carmel. Upon the mountain, Elijah challenged the people to quit vacillating, and to either follow Yahweh or to follow Baal. He then put forth a contest to the prophets of Baal that whichever God sent fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifices, that would prove who was really God. When Yahweh overwhelmingly won the contest, Elijah had the people put the prophets of Baal to death. Yet, Elijah didn’t think that he had won the heart of the people. Jezebel threatened the life of Elijah and he had to run for his life again. In the midst of his discouragement, he complained to God concerning the nation of Israel. It seemed as if the whole nation had followed Jezebel headlong into idolatrous worship and would never rise up against this abominable practice. While Elijah’s feelings told him that all was lost, God responded that there were still 7000 men whom He had kept for Himself – men who had not bowed the knee

to Baal. God had not rejected the nation of Israel, for the remnant – the small percentage of Israelites who desired to follow God – was still in fellowship with Him. Paul brings forth this example because in the first century it seemed as if all of Israel was rejecting Christ. While the Jews of Elijah’s day were seeking his life, the Jews of Jesus’ day had been successful in nailing Him to the cross by the hands of godless men. In both cases though, God’s sovereign will consisted of Himself preserving a remnant.

11:5-6 – “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” – There is nothing new under the sun; times may change, but people don’t. Even more true is the unchangeableness of God’s purpose and character – see Hebrews 13:8. As it was in the days of Elijah, so it was in the first century, and so it is also in the twenty-first century. The majority of Israel has always been astray, yet God has never completely rejected them. God has always been interested in the minority – the few who are real truth-seekers. In the days of Noah God was pleased to save the few. God rescued the remnant from Sodom and Gomorrah while destroying the rest with fire and brimstone. God had obviously kept tabs on the remnant of Elijah’s day as well as those of Isaiah’s time. During the writing of the New Testament, it was only a very small percentage of Jews who acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ. In the letters to the churches from the book of Revelation, we see that in the Lord’s Church, there is only a remnant that is being saved. As Jesus proclaimed, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14) While making the point that the majority is separate from Christ and the minority is chosen, Paul is clear that those who make up the elect don’t have the right to boast. God certainly isn’t arbitrary in His choosing, but it is only because of His mercy that any of us even has the opportunity to be chosen. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, continues to tear down the false notion that any of us can earn our salvation by our own efforts. Paul makes the point that righteousness by grace cannot coexist with attempted righteousness through works of the Law. The concepts of faith and grace fit hand in glove, but mere human effort has no place in the realm of grace – see Galatians 3:10-12, Romans 4:13-16. One of the definitions of grace is unmerited divine favor, while he who works earns his wages – see Romans 4:1-8. Thus, again it is emphasized that God’s means of choosing is not on the basis of works, but by His grace granted to those who willingly adopt the faith picture given by God in His word.

11:7-10 – “What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 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.’ And David says, ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever.’” – Paul now asks on behalf of the Jews what is really going on here. In answer to his question “What then?” he reiterates the point he made at the end of chapter 9. The righteousness that Israel had been so diligently seeking, it has not found. In chapter 9, Paul pointed out that the Gentiles had attained the righteousness by faith, but here Paul leaves the Gentiles out of it. He now mentions that a chosen remnant of the physical Israelites had indeed obtained the righteousness that comes by faith. The

overwhelming majority of Jews were hardened so that they could not obtain the righteousness of God. This hardening of the Israelites is attributed to God in the quotations listed from the Old Testament. The first quotation originally appears in Deuteronomy 29:4 and is restated in slightly different terminology in both Isaiah 6:9 and Isaiah 29:10. Jesus made mention of this same hardening when He spoke with His disciples concerning parables in Matthew 13. The second quotation comes from Psalm 69:22-23, which is clearly a Messianic Psalm. The message of both of these O.T. passages is that God will harden those who continually reject Him. Just as God's means of choosing is not arbitrary, neither is His hardening. God shows mercy to those who have faith, but hardens those who refuse to believe Him. Those who reject Christ get exactly what they deserve, while those who faithfully obey the gospel get to enjoy the mercy and grace of God.

ROMANS CHAPTER 11:11-24
(Ingrafting of the Gentiles)

11:11-12 – “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. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!” – The point has been fully accentuated that the majority of Israelites are doomed to have their backs bent forever and to spend eternity in the outer darkness that was prepared for the devil and his angels. However, lest anyone misunderstand, Paul emphasizes that the hardening was partial; some of the Jews who had rejected Christ would yet open their eyes to the truth. God, in His infinite wisdom, has a purpose in hardening those who harden themselves. That purpose is ultimately one of grace and mercy for the benefit of both Gentiles and Jews. The table that had become a stumbling block to the Jew was not to result in eternal judgment for all. The all-wise, sovereign God is able to make good come out of evil. First of all, the transgression of the Jews was opportunity for salvation to the Gentiles. When one studies the book of Acts, it is obvious that the message was consistently preached to the Gentiles after the Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. What an awesome occasion for the Gentiles to be reconciled to God because of the obstinacy of the Israelites! However, the Jews also would benefit from this sovereign plan of God as they were stirred to jealousy by the salvation of the Gentiles. When seeing converted Gentiles in peace with God, many a Jew would take a second look at the gospel. Thus the conclusion presented by Paul through the Holy Spirit is that the stumbling of the Jews will turn out for the best of all truth-seekers. If Israel’s sin and defeat meant good things for the Gentiles, yes, for the whole world, then imagine what good things would come from the salvation of those Jews who would still turn to Christ. (By the way, the Greek word *plh_{rw}ma* here translated fulfillment is the same word translated fullness in verse 25 of this same chapter. The point is that the full number of Jews who love truth would get to be saved.) As a result of God’s great mercy, the united church of Jesus Christ made up of both Jew and Gentile would have an incomparable impact upon the whole world.

11:13-14 – “But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.” – While the apostle Paul has been specifically dealing with the Jewish Christians in the last few chapters of the book of Romans, he turns his attention in the next few verses particularly to the Gentile portion of the church at Rome. Paul reminds those of Gentile background that he was appointed as an apostle to the Gentiles. There is no doubt that when Christ appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road, He had a plan for him to become an apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus told both Ananias and Saul that he was a chosen instrument who would go the Gentiles for the sake of Christ. Certainly with Paul’s heritage and upbringing he would be effective with both Jew and Gentile, but God distinctively set him apart for ministry to the nations. So Paul most definitely took pride in his ministry to the Gentiles for the sake of the souls of those who had so long been excluded from the nation of God. However, he here makes the point that his work is that much greater if his mission to the Gentiles results in

repentance among his countrymen whom he so dearly loved – see the first couple verses of both chapter 9 and 10. The possibility of salvation for the Jews in jealous response to the conversion of the nations wasn't just a wild hope of Paul but was in line with God's promise of the remnant of the Israelites.

11:15-16 – “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.” – As has already been pointed out, the immediate effect of the Jews rejection of the Christ was the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Those Gentiles who were faithfully obedient were then reconciled to God. Thus, as a result of the obstinacy of Israel, now the whole world has opportunity for reconciliation. Secondly, the Jews who would turn in repentance because of the mercy shown to the Gentiles would be as those who were brought back to life from the dead. Israelites who became Christians could now come to know God, and even more importantly to be known by Him. The Holy Spirit now uses the illustrations of dough as well as roots and branches to speak of Israel. First of all, Paul says that if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also. The source of this analogy stems from the Old Testament book of Numbers. In Numbers 15:17-21 we see that the sons of Israel were to present a cake of the first of their dough to God as an offering. In presenting this offering to the Lord, the Israelites were acknowledging that the whole grain harvest was consecrated or set apart as that which belongs to God. In the same manner, if the root of a tree is set apart to God, then the branches which derive life from that root will be holy also. The Holy Spirit is communicating through Paul the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were a holy root and therefore, the Israelites who came to Christ were fulfilling the intentions of the formation of Israel. Those who were obedient by faith would be considered a part of the holy lump of dough or the holy branches.

11:17-18 – “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, 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.” – Remember that the church in Rome consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. Not surprising to us, there was a slight schism between the two groups. Throughout the prior portion of the book of Romans, Paul has had to repetitively communicate to the Jews that it was always part of God's plan for the Gentiles to be saved under the New Covenant. The Jewish Christian had a difficult time laying aside the pride of heritage to accept the Gentile Christian as a fellow heir of Christ. However, this spirit of haughtiness didn't flow only from the Jew toward the Gentile, but was returned in a slightly different fashion from Gentile to Jew. Now Paul has begun to focus on the attitude of the individual Gentile towards the Jews, especially toward those who would become Christians. In knocking the Gentile Christians down off their high horse, God reminds them that they had been on the outside and had been spiritually grafted in among the Jews by God's grace. In line with the present analogy Paul is using of roots and branches, he reminds the Gentile that he is a branch that is dependent on the Israelite root. The Gentile needed to have an attitude of gratitude rather than one of arrogance. Paul emphasizes that the Gentile was grafted in to the blessings that God had promised to the patriarchs of

Israel. The Gentile could not offer anything substantial to God or His long-term plan, so it was only because of God's mercy that he had the opportunity to be grafted in to the olive tree established by the Lord.

11:19-21 – “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.” – The Gentile Christian who is struggling with contempt for the Jews might in his mind attempt to justify his arrogance. This Gentile who has turned to Christ will be quick to mention that others were removed so that he could be grafted in. While it is true that some had been broken off, this removal wasn't because the Gentile was so great that God just had to make a spot for him on the team. The reason that some of the branches were broken off was because of their unbelief, while the Gentile was still connected because of his faith. (As a side point, the emphasis on the faith of the individual for their position in the olive tree adequately refutes those who hold to the false position of complete predestination apart from free choice. As we will soon see, the logical outcome of the point that Paul here makes is such that there is no such thing as “once saved, always saved.”) The Holy Spirit's exhortation to the Gentile is to set aside his conceit and to adopt the appropriate attitude of fear towards the Sovereign God. Paul reminds the Gentile that if the Jews who turned away were not spared by God in spite of all the special effort that God had put into them, neither will God hesitate to cast aside any apostate Gentile Christian.

11:22-24 – “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. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 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.” – As Paul turns the attention of the Gentile Christian to God, he reminds them of both the kindness and severity of God. So many people want a God who is only kind, but as has been earlier pointed out in the book of Romans, God's love as demonstrated through the death of Christ means nothing if there is not such a thing as God's wrath. In other words, it makes no sense for Christ to bear the punishment of our sins in His body on the cross if everyone is going to make it to heaven anyway. God is a jealous and just God who has shown His severity towards the Jews who obstinately stumbled over the Christ. The Israelite nation as a whole fell out of favor with God, but the Gentiles who found the righteousness of God by faith came into fellowship with Him. This great kindness shown to the Gentiles is truly amazing, but Paul warns them not to take it for granted, because God's kindness is conditional. God's promises and covenants with man have always been conditional. If any man, Jew or Gentile, fails to meet the conditions set by the Almighty, then he will be cut off from the olive tree planted by God. (Again it is easy to see that the Calvinistic view of TULIP – total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints – is totally contrary to Scripture.) The Gentile also should not assume that the door of salvation has been closed to the Jews, for Paul makes it clear that the door is open to any

Jew who will repent of his unbelief. He underscores this point by reminding the Gentiles that though they were wild olives, they were grafted into a cultivated olive tree. In other words, God took those who had no participation in His covenants and, through the work of Christ, placed them in the realm of grace. If God would extend His mercy to the wild branches, would He not be willing to go to the same length for those who had been natural branches? Again we see that any Jew who would adopt the faith picture given by God through Jesus Christ would be allowed back into the olive tree. Notice that the Scripture does not say that every Jew is still connected nor does it imply that the Jews will at some point all be saved. The book of Romans is consistent; only those with faith, Jew or Gentile, will receive the righteousness of God. Along the same lines, it is important to note that there is only one olive tree. God's chosen people of today do not consist of all physical descendants of Israel, nor are all Gentiles excluded from God's nation. Rather, we see that the olive tree with which God is concerned is made up of the church of Jesus Christ, that is, the faithful among both Jews and Gentiles.

ROMANS CHAPTER 11:25-36

(God's mercy to all)

11:25 – “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery -- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation -- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;” – In working on the Gentile Christians to develop a humble and thankful attitude, Paul wanted them to have all the pertinent information. Paul wanted to let them in on a little secret of God that no one would have understood unless God had revealed it. This mystery was the fact that while there was a partial hardening among Israel, there was a percentage of Jews, presently in opposition to Christ, who would still turn to God. Following the mass rejection of the Christ by the Jewish people when they nailed Him to the cross in A.D. 30, God gave the people of Israel a period of 40 years to get it figured out. Initially there were a number of Jews who responded to the gospel as the apostles gave witness of Christ's resurrection. However, as the momentum of the church grew in Jerusalem and the surrounding region, the hostility of the Jews greatly increased against the church. With the first taste of blood from the stoning of Stephen, a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem and the Christians were scattered. With the immersion of the Holy Spirit upon the household of Cornelius, the door of salvation was opened to the Gentiles and thereupon started a great harvest among the nations. Because of the ongoing affliction of Christians at the hands of the Jews, some of the Gentile Christians developed an enmity and attitude of superiority toward them instead of praying for their enemies as Christ commanded – see Matthew 5:44. The apostle Paul was a great spokesman for the hope of other violent aggressors against the church of Jesus Christ. It wasn't until the call had been fully made to all the Jews (surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have – Romans 10:18 ff) and ample time given for their response that God sent His armies (the Roman armies under control of Titus) to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This complete destruction of the Jewish system was God's final effort to get the Jews to acknowledge that they had missed the Messiah and that they needed to obey the glorified Christ. When Paul was writing this letter to the Romans, God's judgment on the Jews was still approximately 15 years away. Thus Paul didn't want the Gentiles developing a contrary attitude to Jewish Christians nor to Jews who would yet become converted to Jesus Christ. We also see that Paul reiterates the fact that God was using the partial hardening of Israel for the very purpose of saving all Gentiles who would respond in obedience of the faith.

11:26-27 – “and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliver will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.’ ‘This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” – There is a tremendous amount of confusion concerning the first statement made in these verses. The majority of “evangelical Christians” have believed the lie of pre-millennialism. These misled people believe that when the Scripture here says that “all Israel will be saved” it means that in the end times there will be a mass turning of those of the physical lineage of Abraham to the gospel. This interpretation is contrary to all of the previous teaching of the book of Romans that “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel – see Romans 9:6 ff.” It is apparent from the immediate context of Romans 11 that God is speaking of the full

remnant of Israelites, those who are the “called, chosen, and faithful” among the nation of Israel. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul is underscoring the points previously made in this chapter: 1) God uses the disobedience of the Jews to open a door for the Gentiles, 2) God uses the conversion of the Gentiles to stir the Jews to jealousy, and 3) the final result is salvation for all the chosen among both Gentiles (“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”) and Jews (“all Israel shall be saved”). Paul establishes that this eternal plan of God was concealed in the Old Testament as it foretold of the New Covenant. It was prophesied that the Deliverer would come from Zion and for the sake of Zion. The deliverance that would be granted through Jesus was salvation from sin – see Matthew 1:21. Note that ungodliness is not simply forgiven, but is forgiven, forgotten, and removed from Jacob. The New Covenant would take effect with the death of Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:15-17) and is applicable to anyone who has those sins remitted in immersion – see Acts 2:38, Hebrews 8:10-12. Therefore, Paul makes the point that this covenant is made with God’s people whenever He takes away their sins. In the gospel, God’s righteousness truly is revealed to those Jews (not excluding Gentiles, but emphasis here on Israel) who have faith.

11:28-29 – “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” – It is true that from the standpoint of the gospel, the Jews were enemies. Here Paul again points out that it was for the sake of the Gentiles that these Jews were at enmity with God. This point is in accordance with what has just been established – the Jewish rejection of the Christ opened the door of salvation for the Gentiles. However, Paul also again emphasizes that this hardening of the Jews was partial; there were many Jews who were, at the time of this writing, enemies of the cross but would yet prove to be ambassadors for the Christ on His throne. There were many who were broken branches that would still end up grafted back into the one olive tree. Again, the life of the apostle Paul is an excellent example of the thrust of these verses. Saul had been a violent persecutor of the church and, as such, was instrumental in scattering Christians to preach the word ultimately to the Gentiles. However, it is also true that Paul was chosen while yet in his mother’s womb to be a personal messenger to the nations. God’s gift and calling in the life of Paul was irrevocable; when Saul had accomplished his purpose as a Pharisee, God removed the hardening and Paul was grafted into the true church. This lesson was necessary for the Gentiles of the first century to understand as it also is for us today. We need to understand that some of the most unlikely candidates and strongest opponents of true Christianity may be the next great ambassadors for Christ. We also individually need to make certain about God’s calling and choosing us!

11:30-32 – “For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.” – Paul here gives a quick reminder that the Gentile Christians had once been disobedient, in rebellion against the Almighty God. He reminds them that they are in fellowship with God solely as a result of His mercy, which in His eternal plan He granted because of the disobedience of

the Israelites. Paul points out that, in like manner, the disobedient Jews were now having God's mercy shown to them consistent with God's character of showing mercy to the Gentiles. Paul is reminding the Gentile Christians who are struggling with contempt to be thankful for the merciful nature of God who is compassionate toward both Jew and Gentile. The point that is really being hammered home here to the Gentile is the same that was made in chapter 9 to the Jew – God is the only Sovereign and He has an eternal plan which He is executing among the sons of men. Through the means of the Law, whether natural or written, God has brought all men to the recognition of their disobedience, in order that they may understand their dependence upon His mercy. May each of us take this to heart, praising God for His mercy, and putting our faith in the One who is able to make us “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.”

11:33-35 – “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?’ Or ‘Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?’” – Paul gives a fitting summary to the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans. He closes chapter 11 by making the point that God knows what He is doing, even when we can't figure out His plan. This discussion of God's eternal plan has been underway from the beginning of the book. As early as chapter 1:16, Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel because of its power for salvation for the faithful Jew and also for the believing Gentile. In chapter 1 the disobedience of the Gentiles was established, while the rebellion of the Jew was shown in chapter 2. The absolute need for God's mercy by all was brought out in chapter 3. The fact that God has not changed His mind, but has been working His permanent plan all along for the benefit of the faithful is the point of the intermediate chapters. In chapter 9 Paul specifically begins the topic that he completes here in chapter 11. At the beginning of chapter 9 he says that he has great sorrow concerning the separated state of his kinsmen, but here he breaks forth in praise for the absolute wisdom of God in His dealings with both Jew and Gentile. One thing that we find when we examine God's planning and execution is that He doesn't do the things the way that men would. Yet even when we get just a glimpse of the results, we quickly find that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts – see Isaiah 55:8-9. If we are honest, we must admit that we don't hold God in the dock, for He is the One with the gavel in the eternal courtroom. It is total arrogance and ignorance for man to think that apart from the divine revelation of God's Word, he could ever understand why things happen the way they do. In answer to the question, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Isaiah 40:13) the Scriptural answer is only those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit in conjunction with His word – see 1 Corinthians 2:16, Matthew 13:11. In regard to the second half of the question, “Who became His counselor?” the answer is obvious that no one could ever begin to counsel the One whose name has been called “Wonderful Counselor” – see Isaiah 9:6. The final question comes from Job 41:11 where God asks who has ever put Him in debt. One of the recurring themes in the book of Romans is that man is completely dependent upon God and that our sins created a debt to God that could never be repaid. Who has first given to God that God needs to pay off? Absolutely no one in the heavens above or on earth beneath or under the earth! Instead of even thinking such a thing, we greatly praise God for His “indefinable gift.”

11:36 – “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” – What an awesome finish to this section of the book of Romans! Wasn't the sovereignty of God the whole point of chapters 9-11? It's not all about me, but it's all about God! Any selfish ambitions, plans, goals, and desires are irrelevant in the eternal scope; the only thing that counts is God's plan. Faith is not merely any dream or any desire; rather, faith is the adoption of God's desire as my own. Truly from God all things exist, for He is the source of all life. It is only through Him that we have the privilege of playing an honorable role in the eternal script. He is also the end of all that the whole existence of mankind leads up to where He will be all in all. To Him be the glory forever. Amen!

ROMANS CHAPTER 12:1-2
(Service and attitude toward God)

In the previous chapters of the book of Romans, Paul has largely dealt with doctrinal issues foundational for faith. The first eight chapters were more of an individual nature, while chapters 9-11 really dealt with the physical nation of Israel as well as true spiritual Israel. God's magnificent, eternal plan was carefully communicated in general terms portraying the purpose behind His workings with both the Jews and the Gentiles. The last chapters of Romans take the faith picture that has been painted and draw application from it. The emphasis in the final portion of Romans is to exhort Christians to practice righteousness on a practical level.

12:1 – “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.” – A beautiful transition is made bridging the previous portion of Romans with the rest of the book. Chapter 11 strongly concluded with emphasis on God's sovereignty. The point has been fully made that our earthly existence is not for our personal benefit but for the glory of God. With that foundation well laid, Paul now goes to work on the purpose of the life of a Christian. With great practical points, he communicates what it looks like when the righteous man lives by faith. Fittingly, he begins with the Christian's service and attitude toward God, the architect and builder of all things. With a quick reminder of the great mercies of God that enable us to be in fellowship with Him, Paul exhorts us to offer our bodies as sacrifices to God. It is interesting to note that new creatures in Christ are referred to in the New Testament in various places as 1) the temple of the living God, 2) priests who render service to God, and 3) the sacrifices which are offered to God. In this verse, the Holy Spirit emphasizes both the priestly nature of Christians as well as the sacrificial character displayed in our physical beings. Under the Old Testament, there were multiple types of offerings required under the law including burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings (Mr. Simpson taught on all of these during Bible School Class recently). In one sacrifice for all time, Jesus Christ has fully offered what was necessary for sin and guilt. Christians continue to offer peace offerings (signifying thanksgiving and fellowship) in the Lord's Supper, as Mr. Simpson has dutifully and consistently pointed out. Some Christians get to offer themselves as a drink offering when they are martyred for Christ – see Philippians 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:6, Revelation 6:9-10. Grain offerings, which accompanied burnt offerings and peace offerings, were offered as presents to God acknowledging His goodness and expressing devotion to Him – under the New Testament this could include sacrificial giving on behalf of fellow saints and the work of the church – see Hebrews 13:16. When Paul speaks of us offering our bodies as a sacrifice, he seems to be referring back to the burnt offerings. These were unblemished animal sacrifices that were completely burned and were offered voluntarily to express devotion to God. Under the New Covenant, the living bodies of Christians have replaced the dead bodies of animals – see Hebrews 10:5-9. However, we too are holy, without defect. Christians are cleansed at immersion into Christ and are then sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Just as the burnt offerings were wholly consumed in the sacrifice, so our bodies are completely offered to God. When Christians

fail to give 100% to the Lord, they are despising Him – see Malachi 1:6-14. The sacrifice of our body is acceptable and pleasing in the sight of God only when it flows from our heart. It has been well said that what you do does not determine whether it is secular or sacred, but why you do it. God wants our hearts to prostrate before His heavenly throne in worship or else He will not accept all of our external service – see Isaiah 1:10-15, Micah 6:6-8, Isaiah 29:11-14. When our service, the offering of sacrifice to God, flows from our worship before His throne, then we are pleasing in His sight. (As a sidenote, the translators added the phrase “of worship” to the end of the verse. In the Scripture, there is no such thing as a worship service. Worship is that which is done in the inner man, while service is what is done with the body. God wants our service to be the overflow of our worship.)

12:2 – “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.” – After exhorting in verse 1 for Christians to offer their body as a living sacrifice “24/7”, the Holy Spirit now gives the only means by which this can be a reality in our lives. We are told both what to avoid and what to pursue in order to accomplish this goal. The reality is that there are only two possible choices for the individual Christian; either he is growing or he is dying. Either he is being molded back into the likeness of this world, or he is being transformed into something totally different from the world. There is a pattern or a mold that this earthly realm fits into quite nicely. Unfortunately this mold is evil and in direct opposition to the will of God the Father. Satan, the god of this world, is hard at work to try to bend our thoughts back to his ways. He uses the media, the government, counterfeit religion, false education, as well as the wicked deeds of typical men to attempt to mold us to his agenda. The nature of the spiritual battle is such that a person does not have to intentionally desire worldliness in order for it to swallow him up. The Christian must be proactive in guarding against worldly thoughts by directly focusing on a positive course – see Matthew 12:43-45. While the tearing down of an old building is a necessity for the construction of a new one, the work must be started on the new or there will just be a rubble heap left from the old. The apostle Paul speaks of a transformation that takes place in the life of the Christian through a renewal process. The Scripture is everywhere consistent that the power of transformation comes from God Himself – e.g. 2 Corinthians 3:18. As a matter of fact, He is the only one who can perform the work of transformation. As we see in this verse, the phrase “be transformed” is in passive voice, in other words the Christian doesn’t transform himself but is to let himself be transformed by God. That having been said, this verse is equally clear through the imperative mood that the Christian has an active role in this process. God will not do the work of transformation apart from intentional participation from the Christian. God places the responsibility of renewing the mind upon the individual Christian. Every Christian must be committed to replacing fruitless thoughts with the imperishable seed of God’s word. No Christian will remain faithful apart from commitment to renewing practices such as Bible reading and study, Scripture memorization, prayer, singing spiritual songs, etc. It is through this process that we indeed discern the will of God in our lives and are able to display it through those thoughts, words, and deeds that are good, pleasing, and perfect in the eyes of our Heavenly Father. Indeed this is the only means by which God transforms us.

ROMANS CHAPTER 12:3-13

(Service and attitude toward fellow Christians)

12:3 – “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.” – Due to both the power and subtlety of the conforming powers of this present evil age, it is important for each Christian to practice some honest self-examination in light of his own spiritual position. Paul, using his authority as an apostle called through God’s grace, exhorts those at Rome as well as all Christians throughout the ages to humbly self-reflect with sound judgment. It is relatively easy to see others pretty clearly, but there are sometimes major barriers to be overcome in order for us to see ourselves as others see us. It is possible for the individual Christian to have “visions of grandeur” dancing in his head without conducting any type of “litmus test” to determine whether he has the spiritual make up for these things to ever be so. The Holy Spirit knows that affirmatives require a lot of work to become a reality, so many a person attempts to replace true faith with delusional thinking. Hence, there is a strong warning not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. As we individually strike out to perform a reality check upon ourselves (not on others, by the way), there are some key points that we need to consider. 1) What we are and what we are capable of presently performing are generally the result of some God-given talents combined with lots of practice honing our skills. Often we want a radical change for ourselves in the body of Christ, but our God-given talents don’t change when we become Christians. Just as God’s grace was at work in the life of Saul while he was yet outside of Christ, so also it has been at work in our lives preparing us for functions that we will perform in the body of Christ. Each Christian needs to think so as to have sound judgment. 2) Sometimes we are not yet what we wish we were. Desire is definitely a good start, but there is no way to get from point A to point Z without traveling through each point in between. If a person has a problem with gambling, don’t expect to be put in charge of the church treasury. If the majority of the audience begins to groan or yawn every time you get up to speak, realize you have some work to do before you will be doing much of the public preaching. If you desire to someday do the work of an elder but can’t keep your children in line, understand that you need to make some immediate changes and rearrange your priorities so that you can be a good manager of your household. Let everyone think so as to have sound judgment. 3) Each of us also needs to take our life experiences and evaluate their significance in light of God’s word. Many who have been successful in the world of business or politics wish to implement some of those same policies into the church without first consulting the wisdom of God. First examine the Scriptures and think so as to have sound judgment. 4) Women often have a particular struggle with finding their role in the body of Christ. They can be easily frustrated by the sometimes-slow movement of their male counterparts and by their unwillingness to speak up. Each woman needs to remember that one of her primary functions in the body of Christ is to give glory to men just as men give glory to God – see 1 Corinthians 11:7. The women also need to remember that over half of the church population consists of other women and children, so there is plenty of work to do for all. Think so as to have sound judgment. In the midst of this whole topic, it is important to remember that all is to be done for the glory of God. It is God who has allotted to each of

us particular gifts in accordance with our faith. Let's not wish to run our own program, but humbly submit to the goals of our Heavenly Father and play our role on the team perfectly.

12:4-5 – “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” – The Holy Spirit really begins to work on the importance of teamwork in the body of Christ. No matter how we might try to deceive ourselves, John Donne was correct when he said, “No man is an island.” From the beginning God created human beings with a need and desire for relationships with others. God's goal for His body is for us to be an interdependent unit, with each member fulfilling its function, and lending support when another member is weak or injured. The picture of the church as Christ's body is repetitively shown throughout the New Testament to help Christians understand some very important truths. In the book of 1 Corinthians, there is emphasis upon the body in order to eliminate divisions in the congregation there. In Colossians the church is again presented as the body, with the growth of each part dependent upon the Head, Jesus Christ. In the book of Ephesians, importance is again placed upon the body communicating that the proper working of each part helps the body to grow into “a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In these verses of Romans, we see the stress upon unity when we are reminded that we are “one body.” Paul also communicates that each individual is different – we don't all have the same function in the church. Finally it is noted that there is a necessary interaction among the individual members for the mutual benefit of the whole body.

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.” – Praise God that the church is made up of lots of different people! Every member of the body of Christ has gifts that God has given in accordance with His grace. Obviously if these gifts are in accordance with God's grace, they are not given on the basis of works, so there is no room for boasting by men. In these verses, seven gifts are mentioned which are present in the body of Christ. The first gift mentioned is that of prophecy. Prophecy can mean both to “foretell” as well as to “tell forth.” There is no doubt that the spiritual gift of “foretelling” was present in the first century church among those who had received gifts of the Spirit through the laying on of the apostles hands. While it is impossible for someone to have this gift today (there are no living apostles to bestow these gifts, nor is there a need because of the completed Scriptures), there are still those whom God has given talents of proclaiming His word. The person prophesying should do so in accordance with the standard of faith. In other words, he should only proclaim that which he knows to be true by comparing his faith with that of the Bible. Even the first century prophets were warned to use their gift appropriately, being reminded that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” – see 1 Corinthians 14:32. The next gift spoken of is that of service – diakonia. This word has a wide range of uses in the New Testament including Martha's distraction with her

“preparations,” the “ministry” of the word, the “ministry” of reconciliation, and the work of a “deacon” as well as many others. The point is that whoever has the desire and ability to serve, do it well with a great attitude. As 1 Peter 4:11 says, “whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies.” Next we see the gift of teaching brought up in this list. Teaching is a talent that is different than preaching. Some may be great teachers and preachers, while others may be good at one but not necessarily the other. Those whom God has given the gift of teaching need to use that gift to build up the body of Christ, whether that is teaching midweek Bible studies or Bible classes on Lord’s Days or school during the week. Next we are reminded of the gift of exhortation. The knack for encouraging others is a rare and precious gift (Proverbs 25:11); if you have it, use it a lot. After exhortation, Paul speaks about the gift of giving. There is always a need for both church benevolence as well as private benevolence – John 12:8, James 1:27, Romans 15:26. Those who give should give “with liberality,” literally “in simplicity.” In other words, there should be no improper motives involved and he who gives should do so without reserve – see Acts 5:1-11. Paul now turns his attention to the gift of leadership, which word is often used particularly with reference to church leadership who have authority – 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 3:4, 5:17. Because of the tiring nature of this work, Paul exhorts those who have this gift to be diligent in continuing the work. Finally, we see the gift of mercy here mentioned. Those who show empathy towards an aching brother or sister need to do so with a cheerful heart. Christians who are encountering some tough trials, whether they are physical or otherwise, need someone who not only will relate with them but who can cheer them up. Proverbs 17:22 reminds us that “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” Whatever gifts we have been given, let us hone our skills by using them in the building up of the body of Christ. If we are not sure what our gifts are, let us get feedback from our spiritual brothers and sisters and from church leadership. In all of this, we must remember to “think so as to have sound judgment.”

12:9 – “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. – No matter what special gifts we each possess, there are some specific attitudes that we must have in order to effectively serve within the body of Christ. First, we see that our love must be genuine, not something that is faked. We must truly will what is best for our fellow man, whether in Christ or apart from Him, without ulterior motives of what we will in turn receive. We must love in deed and truth, not in word only. In other words, this love will be demonstrated in our actions. In this verse we also see that there is a definite distinction between good and evil. Those who want to acknowledge a “loving” God without recognizing the existence of the devil cannot possibly understand true love. True love hates evil, for there is left terrible wreckage in people’s lives whenever anyone participates in that which is not good. If a Christian truly hates evil, it will be most obvious by his stand for that which is good. Everything that is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, excellent, or of good repute is the focus of the child of God.

12:10 – “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;” – It is difficult to truly be devoted to someone else, that is to sacrifice yourself for the sake of another person. Yet the Scripture here reminds us that the church is our true family and that we should show devotion to one another. Our familiarity with one

another should never breed contempt but rather should produce even greater honor among us. When we truly are fond of our brothers and sisters in Christ, then we will be able to count other Christians as more important than ourselves.

12:11 – “not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;” – Again there is a reminder that in everything we do, we should maintain a great attitude. We should be enthusiastic and diligent in our working with our spiritual family. The old saying is true: “If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well.” We should be fervent in our spirit; in other words, we should be white hot and intense. God desires our hearts and our minds, not just an outward going through the motions. As Keith Greene once sang, “I want your hearts on fire, not your prayers of ice.” In all of this, we must remember that we certainly are not self-serving, nor are we merely serving another person, but whatever we do for others, we are sacrificing for Christ Himself – see Matthew 25:34-46.

12:12 – “rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.” – The hope of our calling (the hope of eternal glory) enables the Christian to be in a continual state of rejoicing. Not only do we rejoice at all times, but we also can pause and be excited about the victories that God grants us in our spiritual walk. Often during times of trials it is difficult to see any hope for victory, yet afterwards God, in His eternal wisdom, allows us to see great progress. We need to greatly rejoice in the fruit of those trying times so that we can remember those good things when we encounter our next tribulation. Part of our ability to persevere in difficult situations is the memory of the tremendous rewards of past experience. Devotion to prayer is also a necessity for developing perseverance. If Jesus needed constant communication with the Father in order to be strengthened for His work, so also do we. Without devotion to prayer, the spiritual battle would leave us beaten and bloodied with no hope for healing and no courage to go on. However, when we get encouragement from our King who leads us in battle and prepares our hands for war and heals our wounds and strengthens our hearts, then we can fulfill all of the exhortations listed here in chapter 12.

12:13 – “contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.” – Every true believer in Christ should always be looking for needs of the saints that he can help to fill. These needs range from spiritual struggles to financial burdens, but here the emphasis is upon the opening of your home to a fellow Christian. One of the requirements of an elder is that he practice hospitality (I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8), for the opening of your house to others for an extended period of time is one of the most difficult yet loving things that can be done. You have to be able to accept people as they currently are and patiently expend your life and the lives of your family members for the sake of a brother or sister in need. Your attitude while laying your family on the line is an indicator of your true love or lack thereof toward the church – see I Peter 4:9.

ROMANS CHAPTER 12:14-21
(Service and attitude toward all men)

12:14 – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” – Previously the Holy Spirit has been developing the theme of brotherly love toward fellow Christians. Now there is an extension of the same principles to include those who are in the world. Verse 14 clearly communicates the same point made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you” – Matthew 5:44. Jesus goes on to convey the fact that even unbelievers love those who already love them. The true love of God extends beyond our fellow Christians and reaches as far as individuals who mistreat Christians for our good works. Think of Christ’s love on the cross speaking through the words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” – Luke 23:34 – or the echo of that same attitude when Stephen asked that God not hold the sin of his murderers against them. God has blessed us that we may in turn bless others. It is not in the character of Christians to pronounce a curse even against our enemies, but rather to give a blessing instead – see 1 Peter 3:9.

12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” – There is no doubt that it takes a tough mind to be a Christian in a persecuting world. The old bumper sticker is right on when it says, “Real men love Jesus.” This having been said, Christians must guard against a hardening of the heart when withstanding attacks from others. True Christianity is manifested through a tough mind *and* a tender heart. As Galatians 5:6 describes it, the new creatures’ walk is “faith working through love.” If anyone on the face of the earth can really empathize with others, it ought to be Christians. We not only feel *for* other people, but we feel *with* them. When we really put the interests of others before our own, it shows in our legitimate concern for both the high and low points of their lives. Loving our neighbor (both fellow Christians and non-Christians are included in this term) as Christ has loved us includes sharing with them in their emotions.

12:16 – “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.” – It is really important that Christians have the right attitude towards one another. For this to be consistently possible, it is essential that we remember that God is the Father of us all and hence, we are brothers and sisters. Our position in the world (or lack thereof) has absolutely no relevance as to our place in the body of Christ. As Proverbs 22:2 reminds us, “The rich and the poor have a common bond, the LORD is the maker of them all.” There is no place for arrogance or haughtiness within the body of Christ; every Christian is completely dependent upon the grace of God for who he is. Now the immediate context of this chapter deals with the extension of Christian love and behavior into the realm of unbelievers. Here we see the importance of harmony among Christians in order to positively impact the world around us. The main thrust of this verse was communicated by Jesus in John 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

12:17 – “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.” – The natural tendency of man is to take control and to attempt to do what is in his own power to “make it right.” In other words, we get pretty good at justifying our own attempts at “evening the score.” But the omniscient God has a few words to say concerning the topic of really making things right. In Romans, the Holy Spirit begins His discourse on the subject of good and evil with the phrase, “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.*” First we ask, “When can the Christian get even?” The answer is a resounding “*never.*” God is not interested in the individual Christian trying to straighten out and render justice upon everyone who has done wrong to him. This is what Jesus was driving at during His Sermon on the Mount when He exhorted us to “turn the other cheek” and to “go the extra mile.” Evil for evil is not an option no matter how extreme the case. As a matter of fact, we are not simply to avoid returning evil, but we are to look for opportunities to turn others to Christ as we respect what is right in the sight of all men. The apostle Paul said that he did all things for the sake of the gospel, including becoming a slave to all that he might win the more – see 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

12:18 – “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” – This statement is prefaced with a big “if.” When preaching and teaching about repentance, the Christian finds that oftentimes people are in serious opposition to him. In a society where “the customer is always right,” most people don’t want to find out that they are dead wrong. Thus it is not always possible for the Christian to be at peace if he continues to stand for what is right. However, this verse warns Christians not to deliberately “take a dog by the ears” and “meddle with strife not belonging to him” – see Proverbs 26:17. James reminds us that the wisdom from above is peaceable among other things – James 3:17. Although it is easy to develop a “chip on our shoulder” in the midst of a persecuting world, Jesus tells us that peacemakers are the ones who will be blessed, “for they shall be called sons of God” – see Matthew 5:9. As far as it depends on us, we are to be at peace with all men.

12:19 – “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” – Vengeance belongs to the Lord our God. As its owner, God has told us to stay out of it and leave it to Him. The Christian’s role is not that of exacting justice but one of giving blessings – 1 Peter 3: 9. There is no place for personal scores to be settled; rather, room must be left for the Sovereign God to render His divine retribution. However, the Scripture is clear as it is quoted from Deuteronomy chapter 32 that God will “avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries, and will atone for His land and for His people” – see Deuteronomy 32:34-43, Revelation 6:9-11, 19:1-2. God will fully punish the enemies of the church in His perfect timing, but we must not rush His plan. Like David in the Old Testament, we must understand that it is not place to lift up our hand; instead we should be patient for God’s divine will to be done.

12:20 – “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” – This quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22 establishes the fact that God expects us as Christians to be transformed to the point where we can maintain a positive outlook toward our enemies.

If our enemy is hungry, we are not to leave him to struggle on his own accord, but should feed him instead. If he is thirsty, we shouldn't allow him to lick his lips in pain, but we should give him a drink. A great example of this point comes from II Kings 6:20-23 when Elisha had the king of Israel set bread and water before his enemies, the Arameans. As a result of this kindness, the Arameans left the Israelites alone for some time. When Christians return good for evil, it provides great opportunity for the light of Christ to shine and cause men to turn from their wicked ways and glorify God – see 1 Peter 2:12. We see that doing good to our enemy heaps burning coals upon his head. The exact meaning of this phrase has been largely discussed over the years, but context dictates that the Christian's part in the matter is one of help not harm. What the nonbeliever does with the Christian's gift is up to him, but the Lord will reward the generous Christian – see Proverbs 25:22. The nonbeliever may repent and use the live coals given to him in order to live anew or he may get more miffed and suffer under God's punishment – see Psalm 140:10. Whatever the case may be, God will be glorified when Christians do good to their enemies and leave the vengeance to Him.

12:21 – “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” – In a world filled with evil, it is possible to feel like good will never win. Sometimes we may feel like, “if you can't lick 'em, join 'em.” However, two wrongs never make a right. The Scripture is reminding us that good never wins if we quit doing good and join the cause of evil. As a matter of fact, the only way that evil can be beat is by continual good. In line with the entire theme of the book of Romans, the right attitude and behavior in the midst of trying circumstances can only be accomplished by God's grace in conjunction with our faith. Let us look to the back of the Book and see that in the end good has eternal triumph over evil as the saints live righteously by faith!

ROMANS CHAPTER 13:1-7
(Subjection to the governing authorities)

In light of much honest and intense discussion of this passage of Scripture within the Billings congregation over the years, these particular verses are worthy of a special introduction. It is easy at first glance to question how this passage fits in with the preceding and following context of Scripture. Many have difficulty seeing a connection between love as described in chapter 12 and later in chapter 13 with judgment that is clearly portrayed in this part of chapter 13. However, when a person considers the fact that chapter 12 really covered the Christian's service to God as well as his conduct with both believers and nonChristians (and his attitude in all of this), proper behavior in regards to governing authorities fits in perfectly with the context. The question of interest for our congregation is what does the Scripture mean by "governing authorities"? Does this terminology refer to civil authority or to church authority or to all authority in our lives with a particular emphasis upon one of the aforementioned choices? I personally have wrestled with these Scriptures and have studied both sides of this argument extensively. As a result I have chosen to tackle this passage of Scripture first from the less common position of church authority and then from the view of civil authority. By the grace of God, I will do my best to present each of these positions as comprehensively as possible that each individual may make a well-informed decision as to which position best fits the Scriptures as a whole and this passage in particular. I also will include some difficult questions or problems at the end of the presentation of each position. Before we press on to the details of each of these arguments, let us briefly establish what this passage cannot mean. Whether referring to church authority or to civil authority, it is essential that we remember that God's authority as revealed in the Scriptures is the final authority. The Christian ultimately is accountable to God for that which the Scriptures dictate. To clearly establish my point, I wish to use two examples wherein this Scripture can be misused. The Roman Catholic Church is infamous for its position of elevating church authority to a position equal to the Scriptures (in practice church authority is exalted above the Bible). Clearly the overall teaching of Scripture establishes that church authority only carries weight insofar as it is consistent with the Word of God. In like manner, England purported the idea of "divine right of kings" from a false interpretation of this passage in order to hold people in bondage to tyranny. Again we know from the rest of the Bible that no physical ruler has equal say with the King of kings. Thus as we examine the viewpoints of 1) church authority and 2) civil authority, let us remember that the highest authority is always God. If forced to make a choice, we, like the apostles in Acts 5, "must obey God rather than men."

ROMANS CHAPTER 13:1-7

(Viewpoint of church leadership as governing authorities)

From the previous chapter of Romans, we see that God has given Christians some practical teaching concerning our interaction with God, with fellow Christians, and with nonChristians. If a Christian truly offers his body as a living and holy sacrifice from the heart, then not only will he be right with God, but he will always conduct himself appropriately both in the church and in the world. The basic argument in favor of this passage referring to church authority challenges the notion that civil authority fits the description given in verses 4 and 6. The authority is called a “minister of God” (Greek – a form of diakonoi) in verse 4 and the authorities are termed “servants of God” (Greek – a form of leitourgoi) in verse 6. There is no doubt that the overwhelming number of uses of these terms in the Scripture applies to God’s people (Old Testament) or Christians (New Testament). As a matter of fact, in the New Testament these terms are almost always used to refer to Christ or to His New Testament followers and priests. Another primary point of this argument is the fact that God has a government for His kingdom, which is superior to any physical rulers. Both of these points are noteworthy and serious enough to demand a close scrutiny of whether the entirety of this passage fits the position of church authority. Without further hesitation, let us examine the following verses in this light and honestly consider if the individual Christian’s responsibility to church leadership is the driving point of this section of Scripture.

13:1 – “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.” –

While these verses begin with the term “every person,” it is entirely plausible that this could specifically be directed to every Christian. The book of Romans is directly addressed to the “saints” in Rome and the immediate context preceding and following these verses most certainly applies to Christians. There is no doubt that each Christian is to be in subjection to church leadership – see 1 Peter 5:5, 1 Corinthians 16:16, Ephesians 5:21. There also is no doubt that Jesus, by reason of His resurrection, has been declared King over all and is therefore the highest authority – Psalm 2, Colossians 1:16, 2:15, Matthew 28:18. Christ’s rule within His kingdom is deliberately described as a government that is superior to all earthly rule – Isaiah 9:6-7, Daniel 2:44. When Jesus commended Peter for making the declaration that He was the Christ, Jesus spoke of His church, which would be built upon the solid rock of Jesus Himself. Jesus then gave Peter the keys of the kingdom and further went on to explain that the church has the complete backing and authority of heaven. After Jesus’ resurrection to the throne, He ascended into heaven and gave gifts of leadership to His church – see Ephesians 4:8 ff. The qualifications, responsibilities, and authority of each of these positions mentioned in Ephesians 4 are clearly delineated in various places throughout the New Testament. Any church authority that is truly a part of Jesus’ church certainly has its origin from God and has been perfectly arranged by Him via His word.

13:2 – “Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” – Since God is the One who has established the organization and authority of the church, then it is

logical to understand that anyone resisting that authority is resisting the very arrangement of God. Hebrews 13:17 is clear that church leadership keeps watch over souls within the congregation and gives an account to the Lord. This verse goes on to say that it would be “unprofitable” for those who are a source of trouble to church leaders. Christians should be careful to be properly submissive to those whom the Lord has established as rulers within the congregation (as a sidenote, Romans 12:8 speaks of those who lead – *proistomenoj* – otherwise translated rule or manage in the N.T. – see 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 3:4,5,12, and 1 Tim. 5:17). Jesus specifically told the apostles that they would “sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” – see Luke 22:28-30. Christians who oppose this Scriptural arrangement of authority will be judged – see 1 Corinthians 5:12, 11:31-32. Every Christian needs to make sure that he is submitting to Scriptural church authority or else he may “even be found fighting against God.”

13:3 – “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;” – There is no reason whatsoever to fight against proper church authority for rulers are there for the good of all. The appropriate purpose of leadership within the church is not to be a fear for those who do good, but for those who do evil. Remember that when Ananias and Sapphira lied to God in Acts chapter 5, there was swift judgment from God that resulted in great fear for the whole church. When evildoers within the church are punished, respect for God and His holy ways is increased among all. In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus lays out the program for church discipline, wherein those who refuse to repent are at some point expunged from the church. Jesus also clearly communicates that the removal of a person from the local congregation, when properly executed, is simply performing on earth what has already been accomplished in heaven. A classic example of this very point is brought out in 1 Corinthians 5:5, where Paul has decided to deliver the immoral man in the church there over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. The purpose of this punishment is in hopes that his spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Timothy 5:20 makes the point that when an elder has to be publicly rebuked, the rest of the body also becomes fearful of sinning. If Christians don’t want to have to be afraid of the authority of the church, then they should do good, in which case rulers within the church will praise them. In 2 Corinthians 8:18, we find that there was a brother who was greatly praised for his work in the spreading of the gospel.

13:4 – “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.” – A more accurate translation of the second sentence of the preceding verse is, “Do you want to have no fear of the authority?” In verses 3 and 4, the apostle Paul has transitioned from speaking of authorities in a plural sense to a singular or specific authority. If Paul is referring to church authority in this passage of Scripture then it makes sense that the narrowing down to a specific authority particularly refers to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. The Greek language doesn’t differentiate gender in pronouns, so the word “it” in verse 4 could just as easily be translated “he” and is so translated in many versions including the King James, NIV, New King James, and Rotherham’s. There is no doubt that both Jesus and those who truly serve Him are God’s ministers or servants (Greek – *diakonoi*) to the

church for good. It is also true that anyone practicing evil should be afraid, for the sword of the Spirit, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart – see Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12. John 12:48 is clear that the word of God, specifically the words of Christ, will be the judge of every individual at the final day. In the book of Revelation, the glorified Christ is pictured with a broad sword (Greek – *romfaia*) in His mouth with which He both wages war against evildoers within the Church (Revelation 2:16) and smites the nations (Revelation 19:15). The Scripture tells us that Jesus is most certainly an avenger who brings wrath on the one who continues to practice evil – see 1 Thessalonians 4:1-6, Hebrews 10:26-31, Revelation 19:2, 6:16-17, 11:18. It is also true that on the great and final day, Christians will have a part in executing the judgment upon evildoers – see Psalm 149:4-9, 1 Corinthians 6:2.

13:5 – “Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.” – This verse communicates two reasons why a Christian must be in subjection to the governing authorities. The first reason, wrath, was previously dealt with in verse 4. If a person wishes to escape the wrath of God, then he must be in subjection to the rulers of the Lord’s church. However, as Christians, we are not simply motivated by our fear of hell. As our faith grows, we are even more motivated by our desire to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. While fear of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, it is not the end. As our love for God grows, fear diminishes and our conscience towards God becomes the overriding influence on our behavior. There is much teaching in the New Testament concerning the importance of a clean conscience before God. While our conscience is first cleansed in immersion, it is continually clean before God as we walk by the Spirit. It is important for a Christian to ensure that his conscience is always clean – Acts 24:16, 2 Timothy 1:3. Hence we conduct ourselves properly toward those who have Scriptural rule over us that we may stand blameless before the great and living God.

13:6 – “For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.” – A more accurate translation of this verse comes from Rotherham’s, “For because of this are ye paying tribute also, for God’s ministers of state they are, unto this very thing giving constant attendance.” Again we see that the authorities are here described as God’s servants or ministers (*leitourgoi*). Without exception in the New Testament, this terminology is used to describe Christians, angels, or Christ Himself. It is worth viewing the eight other times in which this word or related forms are used in the New Testament – see Acts 13:2, Romans 15:16, 27, Philippians 2:25, Hebrews 1:7, 14, 8:2, 10:11. The Scripture is clear that Jesus Christ has been appointed the “Prime Minister,” if you will, of God’s spiritual state – Zechariah 3:4-7, Hebrews 8:2. Acts 13:2 also shows that prophets and teachers, two of the offices of leadership mentioned in Ephesians 4, were performing public ministry to the Lord. If the authorities of Romans 13 are referring to the church, then it here says that Christians are demanded to pay tribute to those who work full time at preaching, teaching, shepherding, etc. While nowhere else in the New Testament does it speak of tribute being paid to Christ or His church, we know that many places speak of monetary payment to those who work hard (or give constant attendance to their positions of leadership) within the body of Christ – see 1 Corinthians 9:6-11 (tie in with Romans 15:27), 1 Timothy 6:17-18. There

also is an Old Testament example where God demanded tribute of His people – see Numbers 31:25-47.

13:7 – “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.” – In a great summary verse that is all-encompassing in regards to the Christian’s responsibility toward every type of authority in his life, Christians are told to give to all what is due them. The Greek word for due in this verse is *o]feilaj*, literally having to do with debt. Romans 13:8 tells us that Christians are not to owe (same root Greek word) anything to anyone, except to love one another. If a Christian has been shared with in spiritual things, he is indebted to minister in material things – see Romans 15:27. Notice that Christians are not to blindly render money, fear, or honor, but should give according to what is due the authority. Just because a so-called pastor demands “honor to whom honor is due” doesn’t mean that reverence is given to a false teacher. But if possible, the Christian should be at peace with all men. In like manner, if a corrupt government attempts to get a piece of the pie when missionary money is sent to help a brother in need, this verse doesn’t teach obligatory payment. If possible, the Christian should be at peace with all men. However, if there are those who labor among you in the Lord, they are due to earn their living from the gospel. In the same way, those who legitimately carry out the proper role of civil government should be paid a fair price. All men should be given the respect that is due them as those created in the image of God. Honor is due parents and others who have earned their gray hair. Christians should “have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

Special Problems with the position of the church as the governing authorities:

- 1) In verse 1, the Greek word translated “governing” (Greek – *u[perexousaij*) is only used 1 other time in the New Testament to directly describe a person or a position. (Three other times this word is used – see Philippians 2:3, 3:8, 4:7). That single time is used in 1 Peter 2:13 which unquestionably refers to civil authority. (Addend – further research shows the noun form (Greek – *u[perox^*) is also used once to specifically refer to civil authority – 1 Timothy 2:2. This form is used only one other time in the New Testament – see 1 Corinthians 2:1 where it is translated superiority.)
- 2) The Greek word for “rulers” in verse 3 – *a]rxontej* – is never used of church authorities, is once used of Jesus (Revelation 1:5), but is used numerous times of civil authorities.
- 3) Verse 4 puts the authority in the role of avenger. Nowhere in the New Testament is it indicated that any Christian presently has the responsibility of carrying out vengeance. All references to Christians’ participation in vengeance look forward to the Day of Judgment. Romans 12, while specifically mentioning leadership as a gift within the body of Christ, strongly tells Christians to leave vengeance to God. If Romans 13:4 is only referring to the individual’s responsibility to Christ Himself, it seems out of place with the practical application of chapters 12 and 13

of a Christian's service to God as demonstrated by his interrelationships with other people.

- 4) The Greek word for "wrath" used in verses 4 and 5 – *orgē* – is often used to describe God's final wrath but is never administered by Christians. It is at least once used to speak of judgment rendered by Rome upon the Jews in Luke 21:22-23.
- 5) In verse 6, Christians are told to pay "taxes" (better translation is "tribute") to authorities. Nowhere in the New Testament is this Greek word – *phoros* – or its forms used to describe tithes or offerings. As a matter of fact, the only two other times this word is used is in the gospel of Luke, and is used in reference to paying tribute to Caesar.
- 6) Not in one literal translation (of which I am familiar) of the New Testament is there a clear impression that this passage particularly speaks of church authority.

ROMANS CHAPTER 13:1-7

(Viewpoint of civil authority as governing authorities)

From the previous chapter of Romans, we see that God has given Christians some practical teaching concerning our interaction with God, with fellow Christians, and with nonChristians. If a Christian truly offers his body as a living and holy sacrifice from the heart, then not only will he be right with God, but he will always conduct himself appropriately in the world as well as in the church. The position of civil authority as the governing authorities is the predominant view taken by the overwhelming majority of translators as well as commentators. The digest of this argument maintains that God instituted civil authority among men for a specific purpose and therefore, Christians should demonstrate proper behavior towards them. Within the context of Romans chapters 12 and 13, it makes sense that our attitude toward civil authority would be worthy of particular mention in the discussion of our dealings with nonbelievers. It also seems logical that immediately following His strong admonition against personal revenge, the Holy Spirit would bring forth God's present means of executing vengeance upon evildoers. Good will overcome evil as Christians continually do good, but evil is not overlooked at the present. Evil is punished currently by means of civil authority and good is recompensed now and not only in the life to come. It is impossible for serious students of the Bible to miss the similarity between this passage of Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17, which clearly teaches about the Christian's duty toward civil authority. This fact alone warrants a careful examination of these verses for the purpose of determining if civil authority is the primary teaching of this passage. (I wish to submit a personal comment before proceeding with a verse-by-verse examination of verses 1-7. In no way is it maintained that these verses give a complete teaching of the relation of Christians to the state. Explicit answers to tough situations are not given in this passage, nor is it reasonable to expect that they should be. Good students of the Scripture do not alienate a particular verse from its context, nor do they attempt to alienate a passage of the Bible from its teaching as a whole. Since God has given us "line on line, a little here, a little there," He always expects us to search the Scriptures, to look at the sum of the "law" and the "testimony." Many Scriptures make a general point without including all of the conditions which the rest of the Bible place upon that point – e.g. Acts 16:31 – while this verse emphasizes the importance of belief for salvation, it does not include other conditions such as repentance and immersion – see also 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 as another example. Consistent with the entire book of Romans, chapter 13:1-7 presents a general picture to us as Christians, with freedom to act according to our conscience in the specifics. The scope of the following presentation is not to answer all of the "What if" questions, for they are adequately dealt with in the rest of Scripture. The purpose of this examination is to see if the meaning of civil authority as the "governing authorities" fits this passage both in terminology and principle.)

13:1 – "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." –

While these verses are addressed to "every person" (literally, every soul) and our hope is that every person should obey all the Scriptures, the context is clear that the thrust of these verses is for Christians. Throughout the Bible, God's people are portrayed as

respectful and submissive citizens. Here Christians are told to be in subjection (Greek – u[potassesqw – present passive imperative, 3rd person singular of u[potassw) to the governing (Greek – u[perexousaij) authorities. The exact same point is made using the same root words in 1 Peter 2:13 when Christians are told to submit (u[potaghte – aorist passive imperative, 2nd person plural of u[potassw) to every human institution (civil authority), specifically to the king as the one in authority (u[perexonti). This verse in Romans goes on to make the point that there is no authority except from God and that all authorities which exist have been arranged by God. The rest of Scripture is consistently clear that this is true in the case of civil authorities – see Daniel 2:21, 4:17, Colossians 1:16, John 19:11. The Bible also allows us to see that God brought in civil law following the Flood of Noah’s day and continuing throughout the Mosaic period – see Genesis 9:5-6, Exodus 21:23-25.

13:2 – “Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” – Since God is the One who has arranged civil authorities, the logical point that follows is that resistance to those authorities is opposition to the very arrangement of God. The rest of Scripture reveals that when civil authority is in opposition to direct commands of God, Christians have the obligation to obey God rather than men – see Daniel chapters 1, 3, and 6 as well as Acts 4 and 5 among others. The apostle Paul is clearly making the point in regard to those authorities who, as defined in later verses, are approving good conduct and opposing evil behavior. All who insist on “bucking the system” when the government is performing its God-given responsibilities will receive a sentence of judgment upon themselves. The same apostle Paul who wrote these words under inspiration of the Holy Spirit acknowledged the authority of Caesar’s tribunal and was willing to accept any punishment if he deserved it – see Acts 25:11. Even Jesus who was wrongfully charged did not resist the authorities, but willingly offered Himself up to them. A sentence of judgment was still given to Him (Luke 24:20) although He did everything right. When any government (local, state, or federal) faithfully conducts its God-given duties, all who are in opposition to that authority deserve the sentence of judgment they receive.

13:3 – “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;” – The Scripture repeatedly establishes that civil government comes under the authority of Christ. However, governments often fail to take warning and refuse to recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Tyrannical rulers despise Christianity because God, in His word, has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness including the proper functioning of government. Thankfully in this verse, God lines out the sole purpose of government. Civil authorities are not to be a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. When government is a terror unto those who do what is good, it has stepped outside of the responsibility given to it by God and is in need of repentance. But when government acts appropriately to its purpose, Christians have a duty to subject themselves to the authorities. In the middle of this verse there is a switch from plural to singular both in reference to the authority as well as to the Christian. In other words, the question is asked to the individual Christian, “Do you want to have no fear of the authority?” If the Christian does what is good, then there is no need to be in fear.

Faithful Christians are model citizens in any locale where the government is properly functioning. Even in our present society with the rampant corruption among the civil authority, true Christians are normally respected as law-abiding citizens and are treated favorably. There is an unmistakable connection between the role of the authorities herein described and the role of civil authorities according to 1 Peter 2:14.

13:4 – “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.” – There is no question that properly functioning government is a servant of God for good purposes. God even uses tyrannical governments as dishonorable vessels in carrying out His purpose – e.g. Pharaoh – Romans 9:17. Nebuchadnezzar was called God’s servant in Jeremiah 25:9, although at other times he is portrayed as an agent of Satan – see Isaiah 14. In a prophetic parable told by Jesus in Matthew chapter 22, Jesus even alludes to the Roman armies as God’s armies in verse 7. Although governments that are in opposition to Christ are clearly under the control of the dragon, that is Satan, according to Revelation 13, all governments still act as servants of God when they punish evildoers and praise those who do good. Just as God uses earthly masters, bosses, parents, teachers, husbands, etc. to administer discipline to the sons that He loves, so God also uses authority within the realm of civil government to help keep Christians on the straight and narrow road. If the Christian commits evil deeds, then he should be afraid, for he will be punished. As a matter of fact, the express purpose for which God established civil authority was as a minister of vengeance – see Deuteronomy 19:11-21. Government is to be a minister of justice; it is not a minister of mercy, or rehabilitation, or redistribution of wealth. In its proper role, government helps its citizens lead more righteous lives because of the threat of swift and sure justice. Government bears the sword for a specific reason – to punish the one who practices evil. Since some have questioned whether the Romans used swords as a means of punishment, let us turn to the Scriptures for an answer. A close reading of the New Testament proves that both the Jewish authorities as well as the Roman authorities armed themselves with swords in order to administer punishment on criminals – see Matthew 26:47, 55, Acts 12:2, Acts 16:27. When any civil authority administers justice in accordance with the principles prescribed by God, it is a minister of God who brings God’s wrath (see Romans 12:19) upon evildoers.

13:5 – “Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.” – While the possibility of civil punishment certainly is a factor to motivate Christians to do what is right, there should be a much stronger pull. The compelling motive for the Christian’s proper attitude and behavior toward governments is to be pleasing to the Lord. Failure to be in subjection to authorities that are enforcing just and righteous laws results in conscience problems before the Almighty God. This is what Peter was driving at in 1 Peter 2:13 when he said to submit “for the Lord’s sake.” Like Paul brought out in 1 Corinthians 10:28-29, our behavior directly impacts the conscience of those around us as well as our own. Our behavior needs to be excellent among the Gentiles so that they have no reason to slander us as evildoers, but instead glorify God on account of our good deeds.

13:6 – “For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.” – It costs money to defend the lives, liberty, and property of the citizenry. The necessary money for this protection is funded by taxation. When government officials are dutifully carrying out their God-given role as protectors of the citizens’ rights, they deserve to be paid. (As a sidenote the Constitution of the United States specifically forbade the federal government from directly taxing the individual, leaving direct taxation to the states and local governments where there is much closer accountability). Christians also pay the taxes that are due (see commentary on next verse) for conscience’ sake (the antecedent of the pronoun “this”). Even Jesus paid the temple tax from which He was exempt so that He would not give anyone offense – see Matthew 17:24-27. When there is a properly functioning government, that is the officers devote themselves to the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right, the public officials – Greek leitourgoj – perform service for God – see Proverbs 29:12. When governments become corrupt, the individual Christian has to determine to what extent he is under obligation to pay taxes. This is a matter of individual conscience, which each Christian must wrestle with and act in accordance with his faith.

13:7 – “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 a great summary verse which encapsulates the Christian’s responsibility to everyone with whom he has dealings. Basically, the Scripture is saying to pay whatever you owe to anyone. If the civil authorities have faithfully performed their service, pay what is due. As America becomes increasingly corrupt (in other words, the majority of taxes collected are for purposes of wealth redistribution, not for protection of citizens’ rights), each Christian has to ask what he is willing to pay. Not everyone is due what they claim is their due – see Luke 3:12-13. If a person is due respect because of their position (husbands – Ephesians 5:33, masters – 1 Peter 2:18) or their track record (leaders in the congregation – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), give them proper respect. The same point is made in relationship to honor that is due (kings – 1 Peter 2:17, parents – Ephesians 6:2). When the Christian faithfully gives what is due to all men, then evil will be overcome with good.

Special Problems with civil authority as the governing authorities:

- 1) How does Romans 13 mesh with Psalm 2, Revelation 13 and similar Scriptures? In Romans 13:2, we are told not to resist the authorities, while Psalm 2:2 and Revelation 13:7 are clear that civil authority is in opposition to Jesus and His church.
- 2) Why are the terms “minister of God” and “servants of God” used to speak of civil authorities when both of the Greek words (diakonoj and leitouroj) are such strong “church” words?

My conclusions drawn from looking at these verses from the perspective of the “governing authorities” as church authority: While providing commentary on each verse to support this position, I felt like I was stretching at times to make it fit, particularly in verses 4-6. The primary principles laid out in this section of Scripture most certainly apply to the individual Christian’s responsibility to church leadership as they seem like they would to any authorities that God puts in our lives. Because of some of the nagging questions listed above in the special problems section, I could not at this time endorse this position as the primary teaching of this passage.

My conclusions drawn from looking at these verses from the perspective of the “governing authorities” as civil authority: When a person understands that God sometimes uses nonChristians to carry out His purpose, this position fits in well with the context of chapter 12. Although it is clear that antichristian governments wage war against Christ and His church, it makes sense that they still act as ministers of God when they punish evildoers and praise those who do right. The thrust of this passage seems to be our responsibility to trust God with His present means of vengeance and to submit to the civil authorities for His sake. This passage also neatly chains all earthly rulers to their proper role. The rest of Scripture supplies me with the information necessary to appropriately choose to obey God rather than men, so I have no unresolved questions in regard to this passage speaking of civil authorities.

ROMANS CHAPTER 13:8-14

(Love and light)

13:8-10 – “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit 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.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

– The Scripture does not in every respect condemn all borrowing, whether it be money or possessions (see Psalm 37:26, Matthew 5:42), nor does the Bible denounce all collection or paying of interest (see Matthew 25:27). However, God is opposed both to dishonesty in lending as well as wickedness in borrowing – remember that differing weights are an abomination to Him – Proverbs 20:10. Psalm 37:21 tells us that it is the wicked who borrows and does not pay back. The apostle Paul uses a transition from verse 7 to 8 keying off the words “due” and “owe.” As Christians, we are diligent to pay whatever we owe and not incur a deepening debt. We are not to keep on owing to anyone, except to love. The nature of love is such that we can never repay the debt of love that we owe to our fellow man. God is love and He wants us to take on His nature. God isn’t merely concerned with our manipulation of the externals, but speaks of the key motivation in our development of righteous habits. To make sure that we do not deceive ourselves, He doesn’t only command us to love Him (although this is the great commandment), but He also commands us to love our neighbor. The simple reason that Jesus said the command of loving our neighbor is akin to the foremost commandment is because love of God is demonstrated through love of the souls of men and women. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John writes, “If someone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Paul emphasizes in these verses that loving our neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. In verse 9, he specifically mentions four commandments and covers the rest of them with “any other commandment.” Paul’s main point is that for every “Thou shalt not” there is one positive solution in the command of love. Someone who loves their husband or wife or children or neighbors will not commit adultery, but will preserve the sanctity of marriage. An individual who loves his neighbors will not kill, but will help preserve their lives. A loving Christian will steal no longer, but will work hard and share with others. A loving neighbor will not covet his neighbor’s possessions, but will rejoice that his neighbor has received earthly blessings. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, and therefore positively keeps the Law. In I Corinthians 13, Paul gave some extra insight into love that would be good for the Christian to hear and do. Here is a sample assortment for us to try out: 1) Love is patient – practice this with your children, or with a slower coworker. 2) Love does not act unbecomingly – try this with your server next time you’re in a restaurant. 3) Love does not take into account a wrong suffered – give heed in your next tense discussion with your spouse or your boss. It is important that we get on fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law as we walk by the Spirit and exhibit our faith in love of others.

13:11-12 – “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. 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.” – There is real urgency for us as Christians to become like our Heavenly Father. One of the major challenges that the Christian faces is the tendency for the daily routine to turn into a rut. It is easy to aimlessly wander through our activities forgetting that Christ’s return is imminent. God expects us to be men and women who understand the times (1 Chronicles 12:32), realizing that Jesus is coming soon. Christians should live each day as if it may be the last. God wants us to be wide awake and fully aware of the intensity of the spiritual battle. Our awakening began at our immersion into Christ (Ephesians 4:14) and continues as we grow in Christ, eagerly pressing on to the prize that yet awaits us. When the Scripture tells us that our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed, it obviously is speaking of the future salvation of the body. In the Old Testament, God spoke of salvation in terms of physical deliverance from enemies. Under the New Testament, God speaks of the salvation of our souls which we have already received by grace through faith, as well as the future salvation of our bodies – see Hebrews 9:27-28, Philippians 3:20-21. The one hope (which has not yet been fulfilled – see Romans 8:23-25) of our calling is the resurrection from the dead. It is essential that each one of us is ready to meet the Lord today. God is sounding the alarm clock of life and does not want any of us to hit the snooze button. The first glimmer of dawn is breaking on the horizon and we must be prepared for the great and terrible day of the Lord! Preparation consists of laying aside dastardly deeds of darkness, and dressing ourselves in battle clothes. Whether they are party clothes or pajamas, the old dress must be replaced with the shining armor of Christ – that is the armor of *light*. Just as the previous verses exhorted us to take on love since God is love, so now we are told to put on light, for God is light. 1 John 1:5 states, “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” The only armor that has been proven to defeat the dark lord is the shining light of the glorified Christ, the radiance of the Father’s glory. The Christian needs to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ as it is revealed in the Word. Our eyes first begin to glimpse this light as we view Christ in His earthly ministry. As we see His miracles, hear His teaching, and watch His behavior in trying circumstances, we can see what is possible in the human body when it is armed with light. The Christian then gets a stronger dose as he beholds Christ’s bodily resurrection, where the power of the spiritual realm becomes even clearer through the absolute authority of Christ over death – the greatest enemy in the physical realm. Finally, the veil is completely lifted as the scroll of Heaven is rolled back and we observe the Worthy King taking His seat on the throne, dwelling in unapproachable light. As the Christian sees in greater clarity the blazing light of Christ, he takes on the very same image – 2 Corinthians 3:18. This light that we wear is divinely powerful armor against all of Satan’s missiles. When we understand the intensity of the battle between darkness and light, we are motivated to lay aside all old deeds of darkness and replace them with righteous behavior. Another incredible principle is herein set forth – as we lay aside, we must put something on in place.

13:13-14 – “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” – As

previously stated, only righteous behavior is appropriate for the day. Anything that would not be approved on Judgment Day is not okay today. Every Christian entered into Christ from a past of varying degrees of different sins. The fact is that whether these sins are obvious or hidden, there is no place for them in the spiritual army. Habits such as drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and strife can be very difficult to break, but they must be overcome in order for us to wage war against the devil. The previous verses really emphasized the solution for all sinning – love and light! We need to recognize ourselves as shining examples to a world that is mired in partying and sensuality – let us eat, drink, and be married (or not married as the case may be), for tomorrow we die. We have the only hope for this dying world, so we need to forgo those old practices for the sake of saving souls. Instead of drinking, we need to do battle against that evil behavior and be filled with the Spirit. Rather than participating in immoral behavior, we need to be an example of faithfulness in a covenant and hold marriage in honor. As a substitute for sowing seeds of discord among the brethren, we need to dwell together in unity. The key to experiencing the fruit of light in our actions is twofold: 1) put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) make no provision for the flesh. It is true that we initially put on Christ in our immersion – see Galatians 3:26-27. However, we need to continually clothe ourselves with Christ – see Galatians 4:19, Matthew 22:11-14. We can't be like the teenage girl who walks out the door dressed like her mom told her to, but having a stash of immodest clothes in her locker at school. There are to be no provisions for the old man; the only rations that we should have are the spiritual food (the Word) and drink (the Holy Spirit) and weekly meals (Lord's Supper) necessary to sustain us for spiritual battle on the side of Light!

ROMANS CHAPTER 14:1-12

(Liberty in opinions)

14:1 – “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.” – The body of Christ is made up of many dissimilar people from varying backgrounds who are in different stages in growth. Hence, there is a real need for acceptance within the church for those who are still weak in faith. One who is weak in faith is often going to hold opinions which are wrong, and will also show poor discernment sometimes. But the Scripture here says that this weak Christian doesn't need reprimand as much as he needs acceptance. Showing forbearance toward a feeble brother or sister can be a difficult task for the Christian, but God commands it. When our fellow Christian holds opinions that aren't quite right, we get the opportunity to practice the words of Christ in Matthew 7:1-2, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure it will be measured to you.” Most of us came into Christ with some haywire ideas and it took us some time to evaluate and adjust our thinking to fit the mind of God as revealed in Scripture. It is entirely plausible that each of us may still be in need of repentance (change in thinking) concerning some of our opinions, so let us show the same tolerance toward our brother that God has shown us.

14:2-3 – “One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 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.” – In these verses, Paul uses the example of vegetarianism to communicate the principle laid forth in verse 1. The person who is strong in Christ recognizes that he can eat all things with a clear conscience. He understands that Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), that he should not consider unholy that which God has cleansed (Acts 10:15), and that nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude (1 Timothy 4:4). However, the immature Christian, not having a complete handle on all of the Scriptures, may not think it appropriate to eat meat for various reasons. Whether his conscience is bothered thinking that the meat may have been sacrificed to idols, or if he is still attempting to follow the dietary regulations of the Old Testament, he is not strong enough in faith to participate in the eating of meat. God gives instructions to both the strong and the weak in regards to their responsibility toward one another. It is natural for a person to attempt to hold everyone else to the same standard that he has in accordance with his present understanding, forgetting that his brother or sister may not be at the same level of comprehension, and may actually be ahead of him. The strong Christian can easily be inclined to look down on the fellow who abstains, thinking, “Come on, grow up!” On the other hand, the weak in faith can hold his stronger brother in contempt while accusing him of compromise. God accepts all Christians whose mind is set on the Spirit, regardless of their spiritual level of progress – Romans 8:1. He expects both the strong and the weak to accept his brother or sister in the same manner for the sake of unity within the church.

14:4 – “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.” – There are many

primary principles connected with the gospel of glory that are essential for salvation – see Galatians 1:6-10. However, there are also matters of secondary importance that require patience on the part of all Christians for the sake of working together to teach the issues of “first importance.” In the realm of secondary matters, God reminds us that it is no human’s place to judge His servant – see Romans 8:33-34. This thought is twice echoed in the book of James, once in 4:11-12, and again in 5:9. In areas of opinion, the Christian has no right or obligation to demand or give an account to man. The important point is that each one of us gives answer to our master, Jesus Christ. Regardless of our stance on a particular issue of lesser importance, we can stand blameless before God if our motives are pure. Because of God’s great mercy and grace, as well as His provision of Christ as our High Priest, we have the freedom to live blamelessly in accordance with our present faith. Praise God for His lovingkindness!

14:5 – “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” – Here the apostle Paul uses the issue of holy days – another real concern for the church in the first century – to drive home the same point just communicated through the example of the eating of meat. Whether the exalted day in the mind of the weaker Christian was the Sabbath or the observance of specific days for religious festivals, it is clear that an individual’s choice on the matter of holy days must not be bound on others. It is interesting that in this chapter, Paul makes the topic of “higher days” a matter of individual conscience as he does in his letter to the Colossians (2:16-17), while he speaks openly against it in his letter to the Galatians (4:9-11). The context of the different books makes it clear that we are free in Christ to participate in anything if it is for the Lord’s sake, but if we attempt to hold to religious days for the purpose of being justified by Law, then it is wrong. Paul himself made different choices regarding circumcision with Timothy than he did with Titus. He had Timothy circumcised in order to increase their effectiveness among the Jews, while he refused to make Titus undergo circumcision as a statement to Jewish Christians that they had no right to make this issue a test of fellowship. Paul also participated in various feast days long after he was a Christian for the express purpose of reaching the lost Jews for Christ. A comparable issue in the church of the twenty-first century might be a day called Christmas. Many new Christians still participate in this holiday without even considering its origins. Other Christians, having more knowledge about the pagan practices mixed in with the name of Christ, may choose to abstain from celebration. Other knowledgeable Christians, recognizing that every day is holy to the Lord, may still choose to participate, hoping for opportunity to focus attention on the physical coming of Christ into this world. Whatever choice the individual Christian makes, he needs to be fully convinced in his own mind that he is doing right in the sight of God.

14:6 – “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.” – While the Scripture does have teaching concerning matters of food and holy days, the Lord asks every Christian to put these teachings in their proper perspective. The Holy Spirit put it to the Corinthians this way, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.” Just as it generally takes a businessman

some time and practice to determine the things that are most profitable, so it takes the Christian some time and practice before he consistently makes the best decisions. Along the way, God wants us to do everything with the right attitude, for His glory and honor. When the Christian honestly does this, there is no condemnation regardless of the decision that he makes. As a matter of fact, God is able to cause all things to work together for good.

14:7-9 – “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” – The real point in question is not so much what we do, but why we do it. The Scripture is not here speaking of deeds of darkness which are done only for temporal, selfish gain, but this chapter instead relates to matters of the Christian’s conscience. Whether the Christian is strong in faith or still immature, the choices he makes are for the benefit of Christ. No Christian lives a self-centered life, for Christ has bought us and we now live for Him. We have no greater ambition than to be pleasing to the Lord – 2 Corinthians 5:9. Even when we die, our hope is that God will be glorified by our death as He is by our life. God has fully demonstrated our value to Him whether we are dead or alive, so we willingly and joyfully serve Him in all things. Because Jesus is our Lord, we willingly carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that His life may also be made known in our bodies – 2 Corinthians 4:10. Christ is not asking us to do something that is impossible, for He has already shown us the way. He died for us to reveal His great love for us, and He continues to live with us in mind – see Romans 8:34. As a result of His death and resurrection, His reward is the Lordship of all Christians, both dead and alive. Christ has granted to both those who have died in Him as well as living Christians the privilege of reigning with Him in the heavenly realm – Revelation 20:4-6. What an awesome Lord we serve!

14:10-12 – “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? 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.’ So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” – In these verses, Paul strongly reiterates the principle set forth in the first few verses of this chapter. There were obviously some of the weaker brethren in the congregation at Rome who were attempting to judge the stronger members in the body. At the same time, Paul accusingly points out that some of the more mature members were holding their weaker companions with contempt. Paul reminds every Christian that Christ is the final Judge and that those who insist on judging their brethren in matters of conscience are arrogating to themselves something that belongs to God alone. There is the reminder that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, so the implication is that we should not pass judgment before the time. Quoting from Isaiah 45:23, Paul clearly establishes that the issue before the judgment seat is our standing with (or kneeling before) God. There is no one else that we have to answer to on that day, nor anyone else for whom we answer. *Each* of us will give an account of *himself* to God at Christ’s return, so we should make sure our eye is clear of obstacles before we worry too much about removing the dust from the eye of our brother or sister.

ROMANS CHAPTER 14:13-23

(Edification)

14:13 – **“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.”** – It is possible for the focus of Christians to get pulled off of the great truths of Scripture and be mistakenly placed on peripheral matters. When these tangents become the focal point, there is great danger in obstructing the real mission of Christianity. Thus the Spirit of wisdom exhorts all Christians, strong and weak, to make the issues of eternal salvation the priority of our lives. In other words, we are commanded to quit “majoring in minors,” and to stop “making mountains out of molehills.” The major issues of Scripture require plenty of energy and effort, and many mountains have been raised that need to be cast into the sea. It is a foolish expenditure of time and work to emphasize issues that are not “life and death,” particularly if this overemphasis actually hinders people on the road to heaven. Instead of judging other members of the body of Christ for their opinions, we need to choose to remove anything about us that may cause our brother or sister to stumble. When each Christian puts others above himself, and chooses to serve his brother, the main objective of seeking and saving the lost will be effectively accomplished.

14:14 – **“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.”** – In line with the entire teaching of Scripture, and the theme of faith in the book of Romans, this verse clearly expresses the fact that outer actions are not nearly as important the inner intent of the individual. Paul states with full conviction that in Christ nothing is unclean in itself – see 1 Timothy 4:4 and Titus 1:15. Impurity pertains not to externals such as foods, but to the Christian who questions whether or not it is right for him to partake. Paul is not saying that sin is simply a subjective matter; rather, he is communicating that even activities that are wholesome are wrong for the person whose conscience is bothered. From this verse, the strong in faith should be encouraged because Paul agrees with them that all things are lawful when done with pure motives. On the other hand, the weak are also helped, because Paul reminds the strong that the weak are doing the right thing when they refuse to participate in activities they consider to be unclean.

14:15 – **“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.”** – Paul refers back to his point made at the end of verse 13 – don’t “put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.” The journey from hell to heaven is a long one; as a matter of fact, the only One who had the endurance necessary to make the trek alone was Jesus Christ. The glorified Christ is the One who descended into Hades, snapped the bonds of the abyss, and has now been exalted above the heavens. In accomplishing this journey, He entered as a forerunner for us, and in the process left us the directions and the means by which we can follow. Faith – the great theme of Romans – is the only means of victory for overcoming the hellish pull of the world. However, faith in itself is not sufficient for an individual to become like Christ. Seeing Christ in all of His glory must be combined with a love for the souls of all men and women in order for it to be profitable – see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13. Throughout the New Testament there is great

emphasis placed upon the importance of the new creation, which can be defined as “faith working through love” – compare Galatians 6:15 with Galatians 5:6. In the latter portion of the book of Romans, Paul really stresses the necessity of love for others. Once an individual has entered by the small gate, he must continue on the narrow way in order to achieve the destination of heaven – see Matthew 7:14. The last thing needed by a new Christian or one who is still weak in faith is the addition of obstacles placed there by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Hence there is a great need for each Christian to walk by love and to be conscious of his brothers. The individual must not simply ask, “Can I do this and get away with it?” but “Will this help keep the road clear for those following me in Christ?” When the selfish focus is removed, and center of attention is placed on others, there is true imitation of the walk of our Savior. Christ loved our brother enough to die for him, so we should be willing to sacrifice our preferences so that he will not be destroyed.

14:16-17 – “Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” – If a Christian who is strong in faith eats meat in the presence of a weaker brother, the weaker Christian will be injured. This damage will be even deeper if, as a result of the insistence of the strong, the weaker brother partakes in that which bothers his conscience. The final outcome of such matters is disunity within the church and God’s name being blasphemed among the unbelievers. The tremendous liberty that we have in Christ should be upheld and honored as good news, not as something that the Gentiles can slander. We need to use our freedom as bondslaves of God, protecting the conscience of all believers, so that those who revile our good behavior in Christ will be put to shame – see 1 Peter 2:16 and 3:16. The value of God’s kingdom has nothing whatsoever to do with eating and drinking, nor even the freedom to do such things. The tremendous worth of Christ’s church is the freedom that comes from righteousness before God. What people should see is not controversy over whether certain practices are acceptable to God, but the Christian’s peace toward God because of the justification granted by Jesus. There should be no strife among brethren due to difference of opinions, but great joy flowing from unity in the Spirit. Jesus has always wished for people to understand that His precious kingdom is not characterized by external exhibition, but consists of that which is within the heart and among the spirit of His disciples – Luke 17:21, John 18:36.

14:18-19 – “For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” – Anyone who serves Christ in the way of righteousness, peace, and joy is doubly blessed. Most importantly, this new creature who walks in love is pleasing to God. As mentioned earlier in the notes on this chapter, we have no greater goal than to be pleasing to the Lord. An added benefit is that when we demonstrate our love for God through service for our fellow man, we gain the respect of men. The Scripture is clear that the desire of Christians must be to please God rather than men. However, those who carry the attitude of “I don’t care what anybody thinks of me” neglect much Biblical teaching about reputation. Proverbs 3:3-4 makes the point that those who combine a love of the truth with kindness toward their fellow man find favor with both God and man.

While Jesus sojourned on earth, God was well pleased with Him, but He also gained a good reputation among the people. In the only verse of the New Testament that speaks of the years of Jesus between the age of 12 and 30, it is written, “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52) Remember also that one of the qualifications for eldership is a good reputation with those outside the church – 1 Timothy 3:7. When we live by faith and are restrained by love, we are acceptable to God and approved by men. In line with this thought, Paul reminds all Christians to pursue the things which make for peace and edification. Earlier in Romans, it has been shown that Christians are at peace with God because Christ has justified us. However, Paul reminds us that we also need to aim for peace with man – 12:18. When Peter speaks of harmony among interpersonal relationships in chapter 3 of his first letter, he quotes from Psalm 34 and reminds us to “seek peace and pursue it.” The writer of Hebrews also emphasizes the importance of Christians being at peace with men in chapter 12, verse 14. While unity among the brethren is truly beautiful, it is not the end in itself. Unity is essential for the ongoing work of the church. This work is twofold – a) converting sinners, and b) perfecting saints. The church is not yet finished but is continually being built up into a living, spiritual temple. Each Christian needs to be committed to being a builder in the body.

14:20-21 – “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. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.” – If a person doesn’t make a conscious decision to always build, naturally he will fall into destruction – Proverbs 18:9. If the exercise of liberty in Christ hinders the work of the building up of the church, then it should be willingly forfeited for the sake of edification. Is anything worth so much that we would destroy the church over it? It is true that all things are clean, but they are evil for the man who partakes and stumbles. If eating meat or drinking wine causes the weak to stumble, the strong should have enough strength to willingly abstain. It is not good to be a stumbling block. Jesus said that for anyone who causes a little one who believes in Him to stumble, it would be better for a heavy millstone to be hung around his neck and him be drowned in the depth of the sea – Matthew 18:6. Paul isn’t issuing a law concerning these matters (he is not saying “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch), rather, he is asking the strong Christian to have regard for his weaker brother, and refrain from engaging in activities that cause his brother to sin.

14:22-23 – “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” – It is important to remember that Christianity is not a religion of the masses, but consists of faith at the individual level. In the church, there is no such thing as “group-think” or “group-speak.” Many would like to make bold statements as to the position of Christ’s church on issues, but no one has the right to say such things. In matters of essentials, it is important that we turn people toward the Scriptures and ask, “What does God’s Word say?” In opinions, it is important that each individual has his own conviction before God. God doesn’t want blind following; each human is

accountable before God for his own thinking and his own belief. Of course, honesty is at the core of Christianity, and God wants conviction, not self-justification. The Christian who can honestly and faithfully stand justified before God in all that he does can truly enjoy the abundant life. However, any Christian who participates in behavior that violates his conscience is condemned when he does so because he has sinned. Sin is not simply breaking a commandment of God, nor failure to do the right thing, but sin is anything that doesn't flow from faith. Make sure that all of our actions result from our faith, for the "righteous man shall live by faith."

ROMANS CHAPTER 15:1-13

(Strength to build)

Chapter 15 is not really a beginning of a new thought, but rather an extension of the topic of chapter 14. In this chapter, Paul takes the concepts of strength, love, and sacrifice, and shows how Christ exhibited all of these qualities for our salvation and edification. Thus, God has not simply told us what to do, but has purposefully modeled strong faith through Christ's walk in the flesh. Thus, we get to peer into the motivation of our Lord so that we can powerfully imitate His behavior.

15:1-2 – “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those who are without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” – Thankfully there are those who are strong in the faith of our Lord Jesus. It is good that there are living giants of the faith whom we can imitate as they follow in the footsteps of Christ. On the flip side, there will always be those who are weak in Christ. This is not to say that anyone is destined to be forever weak, for we know that God has a spiritual strengthening program that can turn the smallest weakling into a bodybuilder for Christ. However, as the church carries on its function of seeking and saving the lost, there will always be a percentage of people who were recently sick, have now become well, but need to be helped to full strength. The church is not like Detroit, which has a reputation for being a place “where the weak are killed and eaten.” On the contrary, the brethren in Christ's kingdom “admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak,” and are “patient with everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14) So Paul exhorts the strong to bear the weaknesses of those who don't have the strength to journey alone. Notice that we're not told to just put up with each other, but that we have a responsibility to shoulder or share one another's burdens – see Galatians 6:2. Again it is clear that the focus is not on us, but instead is placed on helping others. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is fulfilled when Christians serve each other for the express purpose of building up a weaker brother.

15:3 – “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell upon Me.’” – Throughout the book of Romans, Christ has been portrayed as our Savior and our Justifier, but here He is also shown to be our Example. Jesus came to earth in order to establish common ground with us, so that He could communicate with us at our level and ultimately pull our thinking up into the realm of the spiritual. Along the way, Jesus proved to us what is capable in the human body when a person is completely subject to the will of the Father. Christ has left an “example for you to follow in His steps.” When we examine Christ's life on earth, it is evident that He was completely void of selfishness. His life backed up His words that He spoke, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Christ completely sacrificed Himself for the sake of sinners – those who had mocked the Father. Instead of demanding that justice be served on those sinners, Christ willingly bore their sins on the cross, and gladly received their insults.

15:4 – “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have

hope.” – Everything performed by the Sovereign God is done with a strong purpose. With the Ruler of the universe, there is no such thing as a random act or an idle word spoken. The Bible contains 31,102 verses and not one of them is insignificant. It could even be said that the Holy Spirit is stingy with words. Thus everything that has been recorded in the Scriptures is full of meaning for the Christian. As Jesus rebutted Satan in the wilderness, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” God, the perfect Father, is a great Teacher, and as such He expects His children to learn from His instruction. God’s words are not dead letters on a page, but are living and active; they are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness. The emphasis of this verse in Romans is the twofold function of the sacred writings – 1) they build perseverance, and 2) they give encouragement. In the spiritual ironman competition of life, perseverance or patient endurance is of the utmost necessity. Without endurance, we are guaranteed to bonk and thus have our names recorded in the annals of eternity with the mark of DNF (did not finish). The only source to build endurance is through a consistent, daily diet and training regimen of God’s Word. There are no shortcuts, no designer steroids, or endurance enhancing illegal substances. The only means of blood doping (taking someone else’s blood that is high in red-blood cells necessary for endurance events) is to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ as we feed on His words consisting of Spirit and of life. God has recorded His words for our benefit; will we implant them so that we may build endurance? Another essential ingredient on the road to heaven is encouragement. It is possible that the devil’s favorite tool is discouragement, for he seems to get full use of it. In order to overcome the obstacles of Satan, the Christian must flee to the Scriptures for encouragement. God’s Word for the saints is not only intended to hurt (discipline from the Lord), but also to heal. As we diligently study the Scriptures and put them into practice in our lives, there is tremendous encouragement. We get to see the power of God in the lives of the faithful, and logically conclude that God is faithful about His promises. When God’s Word is rooted in our souls, we gain encouragement and are filled with hope.

15:5-6 – “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of one mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – One of the purposes of God’s commitment to building perseverance and encouragement within us through the Scriptures is so that we may in turn strengthen our weaker brethren. What God really wants is for Christians to work together as one unit. If one part of the body is a little weak, another one of the members should make up the difference so that the function of the body can be accomplished. Every Christian needs to pattern himself after Jesus Christ who, as was mentioned in verse 3, sacrificed His desires for the salvation of others. When each member of the body puts the desire of Christ as preeminent in his life, then God’s will is done. As we do this, we will be of one mind and will be able to accomplish our common goal of the Great Commission. The Lord’s goal is not for one solitary voice crying in the wilderness, but a full choral group shouting a harmonious song of praise to Him. He who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of our united worship and labor to His glory.

15:7 – “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” – God’s goal is for the brilliance of His glory to illuminate and dominate the mind of man. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, Christ’s prayer for unity focused on the fact that God was glorified through Christ. Jesus continued to pray that all generations of believers would be perfected in unity and behold His glory. Anyone who has beheld even a glimmer of God’s glory wants to continue to bring glory to His name. Thus every earnest Christian will follow the pattern of Jesus our Lord, who brought great glory to the name of His Father. Christ was willing to set aside His safe position in glory in order that many sons could be brought to glory, that we might praise God’s name together – see Hebrews 2:10-13. Christ’s acceptance of us in our weakness brought glory to the Father, and our acceptance of each other, both the strong and the weak, is for the ultimate purpose of God’s glory. Any sacrifice that we must make to overlook the idiosyncrasies of our brother or sister pale in comparison to the tremendous pain that Christ endured so that we too could worship the Father.

15:8-9 – “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, 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.’” – Christ established a powerful precedent for all of His disciples when He became a servant of all. First of all, He ministered to the Jews while in the flesh, and then, even more importantly, confirmed the promises made to the Israelite fathers through His crucifixion, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit following His ascension. God’s truth as prophesied in the Old Testament was fulfilled in the coming of Christ both in the flesh and into the heavens. However, this work of Christ didn’t bless the Jews alone, but also opened the doors for the Gentiles to glorify God. Even the Old Testament Scriptures that pointed to Christ as the fulfillment of the promises of the covenant with Israel really spoke of the future partaking of the Gentiles in the Holy Spirit. Thus the promise to Abraham that “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” was ultimately realized when that blessing came to the Gentiles by means of the Holy Spirit – see Galatians 3:14. The mystery of the Old Testament (Christ in you – see Colossians 1:27) was that the Gentiles would be fellow partakers of the promise of the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 3:4-6. In sending the Spirit, God proved to be faithful concerning His promises to the Jewish nation (which He miraculously brought into existence), and showed His mercy by extending His blessings to the called among the Gentiles. Paul again establishes from the sacred writings of the Old Covenant that God had intended for one voice of praise to come from the Jews and Gentiles who were united in the fellowship of the Spirit. He first quotes from Psalm 18:49, showing that Christ would praise the Father’s name among the nations.

15:10-12 – “Again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.’ And again, ‘Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.’ 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.’” – The apostle Paul continues to appeal to Old Testament Scripture for support of his point concerning Christ’s sacrificial example for both Jews and Gentiles. After previously proving that Christ would praise God’s

name among the Gentiles, Paul next quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43 to communicate that the Gentiles are commanded to join in the praise of God. The next quotation (from Psalm 117:1) is used to show that there is a specific call for the Gentiles to independently praise the Lord. Finally, Paul brings forth prophecy from Isaiah to summarize his previous conclusion – this great hope for the Gentiles is available only through the Messiah, the root of Jesse (King David’s Father). Scriptural hope is not an unrealistic wish, but a solid foundation of expectation. The hope brought by the Messiah is not a wavering fancy, but an anchor for the soul.

15:13 – “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.” – It was previously charged in the book of Romans that all Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Thankfully, God, in His righteousness and mercy, provided Christ as a public propitiation for both the circumcision and the uncircumcision. Through Christ’s sacrificial death and spiritual offering as the resurrected High Priest, Christ brought both faithful Jew and Gentile back into fellowship and peace with God. Thus the God of hope deserves to be praised, for He has provided the only opportunity for lost souls in this world. Because of God’s great faithfulness and mercy, the faithful can be filled with all joy and peace. Not only was the gift of the Holy Spirit God’s means for bringing Jew and Gentile into fellowship within the one body of Christ, but the indwelling Spirit supplies us with power to shout with one voice the glory of God. The Spirit empowers the Christian to defeat the dragon in his lair, and to abound in hope for the salvation of the body. Let’s exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and be filled with all joy and peace. Amen!

ROMANS CHAPTER 15:14-33

(Service to Gentiles)

As Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the church at Rome, he transitions into a more personal approach. In reviewing the past work which God had accomplished through him, and giving details of his future plans, the apostle Paul shows the result of faith in his life. Paul's life is a great example of the theme of Romans, "The righteous man shall live by faith." We would do well to imitate such a man who truly lived as he was conformed to the image of Jesus Christ our Lord.

15:14 – “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.” – Positive interaction among all of the saints for mutual edification and evangelism is much easier to talk about than to truly accomplish. In the congregation of Rome, Jewish acceptance of Gentiles and vice-versa was a major problem. In our current age, different cultural backgrounds, family upbringings, and varying personalities present similar difficulties. However, after laying the foundation of living by faith and bringing that to practical application within the community of saints, Paul is convinced that the Roman Christians have the right substance to be a powerful, united army of the Lord. Paul compliments the congregation in Rome in their goodness – he understands their desire to do the right thing. He also credits their knowledge; he believes they have the information and tools necessary to fulfill their righteous desires. Finally, he recognizes their ability to use that knowledge to admonish each other. Paul's confidence was great that the church at Rome had everything they needed to fulfill God's desire for them. The same is true for us today, so let's get on it!

15:15-16 – “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, 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.” – Although Paul was confident that the church at Rome could handle any problem, he knew that the acceptance of Gentiles by their Jewish brethren needed some bold writing on his part. Something that must be continually practiced within the church is reminding each other of the truth. The majority of sound preaching and teaching consists of refreshing that which is already known. The old saying is true, "If you don't use it, you lose it." One of the charges that Paul left to Timothy was, "Remind them of these things." Similar statements were made also to Titus and in other letters to the churches. Paul's boldness, then, in his writing was a result of God's grace in order to carry out his mission from God. Paul was specifically chosen as an apostle to the Gentiles and he was determined to accomplish his charge. Just as the Old Testament priest offered up sacrifices in service to God, so Paul offered up as a New Testament priest the saved souls of the Gentiles as a fragrant aroma to God. The only way an offering is acceptable to God is if it is an unblemished sacrifice; thus, the need for the Gentiles to be cleansed through the ministration of the gospel. The Holy Spirit performs the sanctifying work when a person is immersed into Christ. This offering of the Gentiles is a beautiful fulfillment of the

prophecy of Isaiah 66:20. Praise God for the privilege of rendering pleasing service to Him as souls are eternally saved!

15:17-19 – “Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. 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, 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.” – Notice that Paul found reason for boasting, not through the Law, nor concerning himself, but through Christ concerning things of God. Paul was exulting and taking glory in Christ Jesus. His humility is further exemplified by his choice of words when he emphasizes, “what *Christ has accomplished* through me.” The result of Christ’s faithfulness in Paul’s life of faith was *obedience* of the Gentiles. In line with the whole book of Romans, it is clear that true faith always produces obedience – see Romans 1:5, 16:26. Notice the means by which Christ accomplished His work in the Gentiles through Paul: 1) Paul’s words and deeds, 2) the power of signs and wonders, and 3) the power of the Spirit. First, it is important to recognize that God performs His saving work through the message preached – see 1 Corinthians 1:21, Acts 11:14, Romans 10:14-17. We also can see that Paul’s message wasn’t in word only, but was backed up by his actions – see 1 Thessalonians 1:5. Secondly, God used signs and wonders in the first century to give confirmation to the truth of the words spoken by His witnesses – see Hebrews 2:2-4, Acts 14:3. Finally, all of this work is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the temple was rebuilt in the days of Zechariah “not by might nor by power, but by My [God’s] Spirit,” so the spiritual rebuilding of the fallen tabernacle of David among the Gentiles is completely dependent upon the power of the Spirit. Paul’s preaching is a great example to us of the result of faith at work in the life of a man who truly believed in the crucified, risen, ascended Lord. Paul didn’t shrink from declaring the full gospel wherever he went. As a matter of fact, at the time of his letter to the Romans (A.D. 57 or 58), his preaching extended from Jerusalem to Illyricum, a distance of approximately 900 miles as a crow flies. In a day of slow travel, this is an amazing territory throughout which the gospel was completely spread.

15:20-21 – “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; but as it is written, ‘They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.’” – There is a tendency of people to look for the easy way. Hence, many modern “church-builders” attend denominational seminars to learn “how to do it.” Now we know that denominational methods are designed to build denominational churches preaching a perverted gospel. But even in the Lord’s church many wish to have someone teach them the best means of evangelism. When a person reads the New Testament, he finds that emphasis is not placed on the methods, but on developing the character and intensity of the people who carry the message. Consider the great apostle Paul as an example. While most commentators would call him a “church-planter,” the Scripture is clear that his single focus was on preaching the word. As a result of his zeal and conviction in sowing the seed, there is no question that many congregations were started. But his goal wasn’t to start churches; in his own words, “I aspired to preach the gospel.”

A quick view of Paul's life is enough to recognize that he had a fire that wouldn't be quenched. Immediately following his immersion, he proclaimed Christ openly in the synagogue in Damascus, stirring up much opposition. His intensity led him to keep preaching in the midst of persecution, and he had to be let down in a basket over the city walls to avoid death. On his first missionary journey, he split synagogue after synagogue, and faced more persecution including death by stoning at Lystra. The following records of his life show a man who was "beaten times without number," as well as much more suffering and hardship. Yet through it all, he determined, yes, he aspired to preach the gospel. Present-day soldiers of the cross need not attend seminars, nor Bible colleges, but we need to stoke the inner fires as we read the book that burns in our belly. We need to imitate men like the apostle Paul who carried the good fight from a common slave to those of Caesar's household. Paul's ambition was to take the gospel to those who had not yet heard; he was an evangelist in the purest sense of the word. He never stayed long in one city, yet he was able to excite interest in the gospel wherever he went. He also taught faithful men who would teach others also. Paul wasn't interested in building upon an established work, he wanted to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 52:15 concerning the Christ. Paul proclaimed the sufferings of Christ and the glories that followed so that even among the Gentiles, the glorified Christ would sprinkle the peoples with His blood.

15:22-24 – "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 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 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 –" – The reason for which Paul had not yet made it to Rome is what he stated in the previous verses. He was constrained by his own intensity to make sure that all of Asia heard the word of the Lord – Acts 19:10. Only after this was accomplished did Paul feel the freedom to go to Rome. Since his work was wrapped up in these regions, he was ready to move on to Rome to visit the Christians there, most of whom he had never met. However, he makes it clear that his aspirations had not changed; visiting Rome was not his final goal. He had a longing to see the church at Rome, but he intended for his visit to be a stop on his way to Spain. (From extra-Biblical sources, it seems as if Paul did get to preach to Spain during the interim of his Roman imprisonments). Paul truly longed for fellowship with the saints at Rome, where he could both give and receive encouragement – see Romans 1:11-13. His statement of desire to be helped by the Roman Christians should not be misconstrued – Paul wasn't into using people for his own desires. However, it is true that Paul was a visionary whose zeal to preach the gospel to the lost compelled him to travel to distant places. Along the way, Paul shared his vision and expected other Christians to have the same goal and to help in whatever manner they could for the spreading of the gospel. Some possible ways in which the church at Rome could have helped Paul include: 1) money, 2) people to accompany him, 3) provisions, and 4) prayers.

15:25-27 – "but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 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.” – Paul didn’t want the Romans to think that he was on a straight course to see them. There was another pressing matter that he needed to complete. Along with Paul’s desire to preach the gospel, he was also very happy to help the poor, particularly those of the household of the faith. Remember that at the Jerusalem conference on circumcision as recorded in Acts 15, along with specific instructions concerning Gentile Christians, they were asked to remember the poor – see Galatians 2:10. Paul and his fellow workers then began an organized effort to arrange for a gift from the Gentile churches in the Roman Empire to the churches of Judea – see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He tells the church at Rome that the congregations of Macedonia (notably Philippi) and Achaia (notably Corinth) were pleased to help out the poor. Imagine what a unifying expression this material fellowship from Gentile congregations to the Jewish congregations would be! When the Gentile churches gave beyond their ability for the support of their Jewish brethren, it really communicated that they understood the fact of the one body of Christ. Paul goes on to establish that not only were the Gentiles pleased to make a contribution, but that they were indebted to do so. This lets you know that the Jewish Christians had made material sacrifices in order that the word of God could be spread throughout the Gentile regions. Both groups of Christians had been willing to make tremendous sacrifices for each other, so the church at Rome (consisting of both Jews and Gentiles) should be able to learn the lesson and accept one another in Christ.

15:28-29 – “Therefore, when I have finished this, and put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.” – Paul himself was particularly involved with the gathering and presenting of funds for help of the churches in Judea. Faithful representatives, of whom Paul would be one, were chosen from the congregations to accompany the gift to Jerusalem to ensure honesty in all of the transactions. Paul had an earnest desire to be there when the Jewish brethren received this bountiful gift from the Gentile Christians. This fruit of the Gentiles should prove to the churches in Judea that they were faithful brethren in Christ. Paul tells the Roman saints that when he has attended to this pressing need, he will then visit them on his way to Spain. At the time of this writing, he didn’t anticipate that his arrival in Rome would be as a prisoner a few years later. But he did know that when he came to Rome he would come with Christ’s full blessing, which proved to be true – see Acts 23:11.

15:30-32 – “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, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.” – It is evident that while Paul wasn’t as yet fully aware of what awaited him in Jerusalem, he was not oblivious to the fact that he would probably encounter trouble. He urged the Christians at Rome to pray for him on two counts: 1) his rescue from the disobedient in Judea, and 2) the success of the aforementioned material offering of the Gentile churches to the saints at Jerusalem. It is obvious that Paul understood the power of prayer, as he asked the Roman Christians to

join him in spiritual warfare by praying. He understood the intensity of the anger by disobedient Jews against him, for he had previously been made aware of various plots to kill him. Paul also was concerned for the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christian under the law of liberty. He was well aware of the tremendous obstacles which still had to be overcome for Christians to understand the true freedom available through Christ. Thus, he asked for prayers that the gift would be well received by the churches of Judea. Paul's goal was that, by God's will, he would quickly and joyfully be on his way as his prayers were answered concerning these two issues. It seems that these prayers were not answered the way he expected them to be. We know from the book of Acts that because of Jewish opposition in Jerusalem, Paul was detained as a prisoner and came to Rome as a result of his appeal to Caesar. We also know that the offering from the Gentile churches wasn't enough to put out the fires of contention among the Christians who were still zealous for the Law. However, God's will was done, and Paul did make it to Rome. God solved the disputes between Jewish and Gentile Christians with the destruction of the Jewish system by the Romans in A.D. 70. Upon Paul's arrival in Rome, he did find great refreshment from the brethren in Rome as they encouraged him in his imprisonment.

15:33 – “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” – Paul has just been speaking of the great spiritual conflict, in part concerning the Jews who are seeking his life, and the rest pertaining to the work of the Judaizers within the church. Yet Paul is completely confident that there is One who imparts true peace. There is peace between God and Christians due to justification brought about by Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. There is also great peace because of the sovereign nature of the true God. In the previous verses, the apostle Paul had spoken of the “will of God.” There is great peace when a person *knows* that God causes all things to work together for good. Paul's prayer is that Immanuel (God with us), the One who walks among the churches, would continue to dwell with the saints at the church at Rome. May this be our earnest prayer in our congregation in our day!

ROMANS CHAPTER 16:1-16

(Greetings)

Some have questioned whether the final chapter of Romans, including the greetings and the conclusion, truly belongs in this book. There are people who doubt it, and believe that the greetings belong to Ephesus and not to Rome. The reasons for their doubts include the following four considerations: 1) The last three verses of Romans chapter 16 have been placed in some sources at the end of chapter 14. 2) How could Paul have known so many people of the Roman congregation if he had never been there? 3) Priscilla and Aquila were living in Ephesus shortly before the letter to Rome was written, and Epaphroditus is called the first convert to Christ from Asia. 4) Paul's statement in chapter 1 concerning his desire to impart a spiritual gift to the church at Rome is questioned if indeed the greetings of chapter 16 are a part of the book of Romans. Why would Paul need to impart a spiritual gift when certainly some of the people mentioned in 16 would have had some gifts of the Holy Spirit? To answer these doubts, let us view some information in reference to each of the considerations listed above. 1) The best manuscripts favor 16:25-27 as the appropriate position of the closing statement of the book of Romans. Testimony of Origen points to the removal of chapters 15 and 16 by a man named Marcion, who had a negative attitude toward the Old Testament. 2) Because of the freedom of travel throughout the Roman Empire at this time, it is not surprising that the apostle Paul had met many members of the Roman congregation in his numerous travels. 3) Acts 18:2 lets us know that Priscilla and Aquila were originally from Rome and had left there only on account of a command given by the Emperor Claudius who died in A.D. 54. It seems reasonable that they would return to the church at Rome upon receiving the freedom to do so. The fact that Epaphroditus was from Asia certainly doesn't imply that he remained there forever. 4) While it is probable that some of the people of chapter 16 had received gifts of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be proven that all of the gifts were present among those at Rome. Without a visit to Rome by an apostle, it could not definitively be said of the Roman congregation what Paul said to the Corinthians, "that you are not lacking in any gift." The arguments against the inclusion of chapter 16 in the book of Romans are based off of conjecture and cannot be proven. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the Scriptures and to begin to cut and paste that which the Holy Spirit has jealously guarded.

16:1-2 – "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 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 been a helper of many, and of myself as well." – Although Paul had not been to Rome, he knew a number of Christians there. This fact communicates not only that there was freedom of travel within the Roman Empire, but also that there was good fellowship among the individuals and congregations of the first century. It is likely that Paul sent his letter to Rome by the hands of Phoebe, a female servant of the church at Cenchrea (Corinth's sister port city). A note of commendation by Paul was beneficial to her as well as to the church at Rome. It is important to note that Phoebe is described as a servant (diakonon) of the Cenchrean congregation. While some attempt to use this verse as a case for the office of deaconess (female deacons), the Scripture usually uses this term

in a general sense. There is no clear mention of a female office of church leadership in the New Testament. The obvious intent of this verse is to communicate that Phoebe was worthy of a hospitable reception by the church at Rome because of her proven service to the kingdom. Women are clearly valuable to the church in a number of ways when they have a servant's heart. Paul encourages the saints at Rome to help Phoebe in whatever matter she may have need, because of her proven worth including her personally serving Paul.

16:3-5 – “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.” – First in the list of Paul's greetings to the Romans come the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla. The completed record of Scripture gives us insight into Paul's relationships with other saints, most of which consisted of struggles that had to be worked through (e.g. Peter, Barnabas, John Mark, Demas, etc.). However, the inspired record indicates nothing but praise for Prisca and Aquila. Paul first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, and he joined with them in the work of tentmaking. They helped Paul out in Ephesus as they took Apollos aside and taught him the difference between John's immersion and immersion in the name of Christ. Their loyalty to the kingdom is obvious by the fact that their houses in both Corinth and Rome were used as meeting places for the body of Christ in those cities. It is also neat that every time they are mentioned in the Bible, their names are joined together. Priscilla and Aquila are a great example of God's design for marriage where the “two shall become one.” Their faithfulness for the spreading of the gospel was proven in their willingness to risk their own lives for the sake of Paul, the leading spokesperson for Christ in that time. It is interesting that Paul's greeting to the first Asian (Asia Minor) convert, immediately follows his greetings to Prisca and Aquila, who were instruments of evangelism in that region. Epaenetus was beloved to Paul, and was remembered as the start of the great spread of Christianity throughout the Roman province of Asia.

16:6 – “Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.” – A lady named Mary deserved special recognition because of her hard work for the congregation at Rome. In 1 Timothy 5:10, as Paul gives instruction to Timothy concerning widows, he lists a number of ways in which a woman's work in the church can be recognized. People who are consistently hard workers are a rare find, but Mary's reputation for work on behalf of Christ's body in Rome had reached the ears of Paul. May the lips of others speak the same of us!

16:7 – “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” – Paul sends a special “hello” to a couple of Jewish brethren (kinsmen according to the flesh – see Romans 9:3), men who had been converted to the truth of Christ even before Paul. It seems that previously these men had been put in prison with Paul during one of his many imprisonments. Certainly Paul would have a special bond in his heart for those who had shared adversity with him. These men also had proven their effectiveness in evangelism and had apparently been sent by their home congregation as apostles to Rome.

16:8 – “Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.” – Ampliatus is a Latin name that was common among slaves of the first century. There was a strong bond of love between Paul and Ampliatus because they were both *in the Lord*.

16:9 – “Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.” – The Scripture most definitely assigns a high value to work. Urbanus is described as our fellow worker, meaning that he too was evangelistic, fulfilling the primary mission of the church. Stachys was another man whom Paul dearly loved.

16:10 – “Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.” – Apelles was a man who had successfully passed examination by God and was found to be pleasing. Apelles’ good standing with God was because of the fact that he was a Christian; he was approved *in Christ*. At the church in Rome, there were some Christians from the household of Aristobulus. This terminology implies that Paul was greeting slaves in Aristobulus’ house.

16:11 – “Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.” – Like Andronicus and Junias, Herodion was a fellow countryman of Paul’s. Narcissus was possibly a freedman who became rich and powerful in the reign of Claudius. Regardless of whether or not this was the same man, this greeting, along with many others in this section, seems appropriate for a letter written to Rome. Paul’s greetings were intended for those who were Christians within that household.

16:12 – “Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.” – Paul again addresses those whom he knew to be workers in the Lord. The names of Tryphaena and Tryphosa make me think of sisters who were a dedicated team for God. Persis gets a special nod as one who worked *hard* in the Lord. It takes great faith and love to consistently work hard (see 1 Thessalonians 1:3), and those who work hard should be appreciated (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 5:17).

16:13 – “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.” – It is neat to speculate that Rufus could be a son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who helped Jesus bear his cross. Mark’s gospel (primarily written to the Gentiles, particularly the Romans) speaks of Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus, as if some of his readers would know them – Mark 15:21. No matter if this is the man or not, Paul gives a becoming description of Rufus when he calls him a choice man in the Lord. Paul also says “hello” to Rufus’ mother, who had filled in as a mom also to Paul. There is always a great need for motherly figures within the body of Christ, so that those who have given up mothers as they gain Christ can have a mother within the church – see Mark 9:29-30.

16:14-15 – “Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” – These people all merited Paul’s attention for their

standing with Christ. The phrases “the brethren with them,” and “all the saints with them” let you know that those whom Paul named in these verses were busy building up disciples. We do not know whether they had house-churches or simply had groups that they particularly disciplined and shepherded, but these folks were obviously busy edifying Christ’s body in Rome.

16:16 – “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.” –

The standard custom of greeting among Christians in the first century was a holy kiss. In our culture, it is a holy handshake. Affection for our brothers and sisters needs to be expressed by all Christians. This is for all members, not just those for whom we are particularly fond. It is most important to greet those who are difficult for us to love. When we go out of our way to impart friendship to those we struggle with, it builds unity within the body of Christ. In this verse, Paul also makes the point that all the churches of Christ sent greetings. It is not enough to have unity within a local congregation; there should be a sense of oneness within Christ’s church as a whole. This does not mean a compromised acceptance of those who don’t preach the truth; those who preach another gospel are not churches of Christ and will be accursed. However, autonomous congregations should have a big picture and be able to network to carry out the overall mission of the church.

ROMANS CHAPTER 16:17-27

(Conclusion)

16:17 – “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.” – Here is an interesting warning at the end of the Holy Spirit’s letter to the Romans. The majority of this letter has had a positive tone and been filled with tremendous encouragement. In the first half of the book, Paul was building the individual’s faith picture, and in the latter half, he was relating that faith to edification within the church. Yet here in his conclusion, he warns about those who refuse to live by faith, whose intentions are destructive rather than constructive. Anyone who thinks that the first century churches were pictures of peaceful congregations full of perfect people hasn’t paid attention to the Scriptural record. There always have been and always will be people who get into Christianity for selfish reasons. These people are described throughout the Scriptures as “men of depraved mind,” “self-willed,” “caring for themselves,” “grumblers,” “finding fault,” “following after their own lusts,” etc. Selfish people have no interest in building Christ’s body, but are well depicted in the words of Proverbs, “The leech has two daughters, ‘Give,’ ‘Give.’” Such fleshly-minded people subconsciously turn to finding fault, and some, when unfulfilled, even consciously make efforts to split the church of Christ into factions. The Holy Spirit strongly admonishes the church to be aware of these destructive souls, and not to get sucked into their trap. First, Paul says to keep your eye on them – you can’t ignore them, thinking that they will go away. It would be great if you could trust everyone in the congregation, but God says we can’t. The true test is performed by bringing everything back to the Scripture. Jesus specifically told us to beware of those who have bad fruit – see Matthew 7:15-20. A person who is not a new convert and is full of rotten fruit should not be trusted. Those whose deeds of the flesh are evident need to be watched to make sure that they do not corrupt others. While keeping track of divisive individuals, it is important that you turn away from them also. Every Christian still has freedom of choice, and each one of us must decide if we are going to be a part of the building crew or the wrecking crew.

16:18 – “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 important that we recognize divisive people for what they really are – slaves of their own appetites. In the book of Philippians, Paul terms such individuals as enemies of the cross of Christ – see Philippians 3:18-19. Never underestimate the motivating power of a selfish appetite! These deceivers will stop at nothing to get what they want. They have developed communication abilities not for saving souls, but for manipulation of others to achieve their selfish end. Flattery becomes a means of adding to the size of their faction – see Jude 1:16. Unsuspecting converts (Christians who have not heeded Christ’s warning to beware) are sucked into the division as Christ’s enemies take advantage of their lack of true confidence. As Proverbs 27:6 states, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” Each Christian is responsible to be spiritual enough to recognize the workers of Satan within the church, or to be seductively pulled into their number.

16:19 – “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.” – Paul was proud of the Christians at Rome and took great joy in their name. The church at Rome had already developed a very good reputation among the brotherhood as well as among the unbelievers. Paul brings this up to give them some added motivation to guard against those who would cause divisions among them. Any time false brethren are successful in splitting a congregation, the negative impacts are felt in other places as well. The opportunity for momentum in evangelism can also be greatly hindered. Paul admonishes them that the Roman congregation would continue moving in the right direction. He exhorts them to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. (This brings to mind the words of Christ to His disciples, “Be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” – Matthew 10:16.) Paul’s exhortation is consistent with the whole theme of his letter – the righteous man shall live by faith. This principle is key to righteous behavior; focus on the solution, not on the problem. A bank teller doesn’t have to be exposed to every type of counterfeit to be able to expose fraud. However, the teller must have a good feel for the “real stuff” so that he immediately recognizes a fake. In the same manner, a person who is living by faith will be wise in what is good and be able to make righteous decisions – Hebrews 5:14. Constant surroundings of evil do not make a person wiser in regard to the workings of the devil, but instead desensitize a person to evil. God wants us to be aware of those who are attempting to use law to manipulate others, and stay aloof from such action. Everyone who will live by faith will maintain a great reputation and will be fruitful for the Lord.

16:20 – “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” – In the midst of the faultfinders and grumblers in Rome stands One who will wage war with the sword of His mouth. He is the great God of peace! God loves peace in His body and will not stand by idly and let Satan cause discord. Here is an awesome promise from the Holy Spirit – God will soon put Satan’s neck under the feet of the saints. There certainly is the point that Christ already has won the determining battle against the dragon, the serpent of old. It is also true that presently God is granting victory to His church over the devil. But a day is soon coming when the final victory will be won, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, and everyone will recognize the saints as fellow conquerors with Jesus our Lord. May His grace be with the church in the great spiritual battle!

16:21-24 – “Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” – The earlier greetings of this chapter are from Paul himself, while these greetings come from his companions. Timothy is mentioned first, for he truly was Paul’s fellow worker. During his second missionary journey, Paul picked up Timothy in Lystra based upon his good reputation among the brethren – see Acts 16:2-3. After Timothy was circumcised (his mother was a Jew and his father a Greek), he became a steady traveler with Paul. Timothy’s character is highly praised throughout the Scriptures. As an example Paul wrote the Philippians, “For I have no one else of kindred

spirit who will be genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.” Timothy was a man whose name was well-known and highly respected among the churches, and so his greeting was a special honor. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, all fellow-countrymen of Paul, also sent their greetings to the church at Rome. The only other time a man named Lucius is mentioned in the Scriptures is in Acts 13:1 at Syrian Antioch where Paul was first set apart by the Holy Spirit for his missionary work. It is impossible to say whether this is the same man or not. It is possible that Jason is the man from the Thessalonian congregation referred to in Acts 17:6-9. Sosipater may be the same as Sopater of Berea who accompanied Paul on at least part of his third missionary journey – see Acts 20:4. Tertius, Paul’s secretary for this letter, also gave a note of personal greeting. Gaius is probably one of those Paul remembered he had immersed in Corinth. Paul calls Gaius his host, meaning that he probably stayed with him in Corinth now that Priscila and Aquila were back in Rome. Gaius is also praised for his ready hospitality for the whole church. Finally, the city treasurer, Erastus, and another brother in Christ, Quartus, also said a special hello to the church at Rome. All of those sending their greetings wanted the Roman Christians to know that their hope was for the grace of Christ to be with the church at Rome.

16:25-27 – “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, 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; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.” – These verses are a little difficult to sort through, so let us first break it down a little. The apostle Paul breaks out in a final burst of praise to Yahweh, the living and eternal God. The main point here is that the only wise God, the One who is able to establish Christians, deserves all glory eternally. However, Paul reminds us that God establishes the faithful in accordance with the gospel he received by revelation and the preaching of Jesus Christ. The only way that a Christian can maintain his faith is by continually hearing the testimony of Jesus. Along with that, the Christian is established in accordance with the revelation of the mystery. The clues of this mystery were hidden in the Old Testament, but now have been made known to all the nations just as the prophets foretold. This mystery is defined for us in Colossians 1:27 as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In other words, the indwelling Holy Spirit (the blessing of Abraham, rivers of living water, showers of blessing, etc. of the Old Testament) has been sent to the Christian, both Jew and Gentile, to turn us to obedience of the faith – see Acts 3:19-26. It is important to remember that the preaching of the revealed mystery, the promised indwelling Spirit, is essential in producing obedience of the faith and in establishing us. May the God who thoughtfully brought this plan to fruition for our benefit be eternally glorified! Amen!