

Romans – Chapter Conclusions

Chapter 1 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- servant – Gr. *doulos*: someone pledged to serve another
- apostle – a delegate or representative; messenger (compare “ambassador” 2Cor 5:20; “elder” Eph 6:20)
- set apart – chosen for a purpose
- gospel – good news; glad tidings
- for his name’s sake – in consideration of; on his account; for the love of him
- grace – good will; a benefit; a condition of favor (or unmerited favor)
- apostleship – sent (on a mission); released to do something
- call – summoned by name; invited into the presence (as to a banquet)
- gentiles – Gr. *ethnos*: nations; every ethnic race
- for obedience – compliance; submission; to act according to a standard
- faith – conviction of the truth of something; belief; fidelity; reliability
- saints – Gr. *hagios*: holy ones
- grace and peace – favor and serenity; harmony as a state-of-being bestowed by one to another

Principles - The Gospel was proclaimed “beforehand” through the prophets, but it was established before the foundation of the world. It was intended by God in eternity, but later revealed to us. Jesus was fully God and fully man so that he might reveal the Father to us (Jn 17:6), and experience our flesh (Ps 103:14; Phil. 2:7; Heb 4:15). We have been called to belong to Jesus Christ, and to call people of all nations to the obedience that comes from faith (Matt 28:20). We have received grace and apostleship for the sake of Christ, and according to God’s purposes (Rom 8:28). Our faith will produce or result in obedience. It is one of the purposes for which we were called (Rom 1:5).

Belonging to Christ means that my body (my life) is not my own (1Cor 6:19-20); my will is not my own (Jn 5:30); my purposes are not my own (Rom 8:28); my freedom is not my own (1Cor 7:22-23). Instead, I serve God (Rom 1:9).

Paul was called to arise in his own generation for God’s purposes at the time according to the gifts that God bestowed on him. We have each been called to call people from all nations to obedience through faith, to serve according to our gifts, and to arise in our own generation, because we belong to Christ. We have each received the same grace and peace from God through Christ.

Implications – I believe that I have been called by God who loves me, to obedience through faith so that I might be holy. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, as proved with power by his resurrection from the dead, just as it was prophesied in the OT. I have been called to obedience through faith, for the purpose of calling others from all nations to belong to Jesus Christ, and to be holy (Eph 1:4; 5:27; 1Pet 1:15-16). I am God’s servant, and his child; he is my Father. Christ is my Lord, my only means of grace and peace. I am his obedient servant, his messenger of the gospel, sent into the world as his delegate to do his will. I will strive to be obedient because of grace: what I believe to be true about the gospel, about my calling, about Christ, and about God; not because of any fear of punishment under the Law. I will be diligent (speedy) to do my Master’s will, being about his business and not my own.

Chapter 1 – Part 2

Key words and phrases –

- Thank – Gr. *eucharisteo*: to express gratitude; to credit for something
- Faith – a demonstration of belief rather than intellectual assent alone.
- Witness – Gr. *martoos* (martyr): a spectator, observer, or testifier as to what he or she knows
- Impart – to give, bestow, provide, deliver, supply, or furnish (equip)

Principles – vv 1:8-15 The Church’s success is in God’s hands. We thank him as we serve with our own hands. Paul is grateful for the report of the Romans’ faith because it affirms the gospel: that grace produces fruit which God sees. Paul longs to impart to them some “spiritual gift”¹ to strengthen them. This will encourage both Paul and the church at Rome. He desires to see the product of his labors, to realize what he has hoped and prayed for. His duty toward “civilized and uncivilized” is the same. His ministry is specifically to the Gentiles, but his love toward both Jew and Gentile is the same.

Vv, 1:16-32 When the gospel is believed, it results in righteousness which leads to salvation – we were *justified* in being imputed the righteousness of Christ. But we are *sanctified* by living out our salvation in godliness. This is a personal righteousness of our own which comes by faith.² Imputed righteousness is born of faith in Christ alone (believing the gospel to be true); but that faith leads to personal righteousness which is acting out our belief – Phil 2:12. Wicked men, on the other hand, intentionally suppress the truth of the gospel, and the clear evidence of God’s existence. They choose instead to forget God, and to worship what they make, which is clear evidence of their own foolishness. Thus they are without excuse. Their thinking is futile (vain) and their hearts are darkened by (1) the lies of Satan (Gen 3:13); (2) their own ignorance (Matt 13:15; Eph 4:18; Jms 1:13-14); and (3) God’s will (Ps 69:23; Isa 6:10). They are left to find satisfaction in what cannot satisfy: they are given over to their lusts. They affirm and approve one another’s depravity so they can continue on their path to destruction without guilt – they justify themselves. Because of the behavioral contrast between children of darkness and children of the light, unbelievers hate believers, ironically accusing them of being “Satanic” (Mk 13:13; Lk 6:22).

Implications – We all have fruit which flows from the gospel we carry: a knowledge of God’s word and will, a passion for the lost, the disciplines of the faith (Bible-study, prayer, fasting, meditation); we are an example (2Th 3:9). These lead to evangelism, discipleship, and worship. We duplicate Christ in others. Our great fear is that Christ’s Spirit is not in us to reproduce his seed in others, because it bears no fruit in us. And so we strive to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). *This is false motivation.* Rather, because we believe, we *naturally* display the fruits of our salvation as bearers of Christ’s image. That responsibility is not to be taken lightly or indifferently; thus we fear and tremble. We realize that we act and speak in the sight of God, with his Spirit as our witness – we must be discreet and circumspect.

If we are to be a holy people, a godly people, *it begins with the mind.* Just as physical depravity and mental depravity are linked, so godliness is the natural by-product of a mind steeped in God’s will – through his Word. The Bible is our primary means of sanctification (Jn 17:17). It is the instrument of the Spirit’s power to transform us (Jn 14:26; Rom 12:2; 2Cor 3:18). To ignore the Bible is to ignore God. Without the mirror and light of Scripture to guide us, we may not lose our salvation, but we will lose the power of it (Rom 1:16); our walk and our witness will be undermined (1Jn 2:4).

¹ What the Spirit does through us to build up the church: prophecy, ministering, teaching, exhorting, ruling, mercy...

² We often say that salvation is the event and sanctification is the process of the Christian life. What salvation refers to in such a statement is God’s declaration that we are forgiven our debt of sin, and we are made righteous with the righteousness of Christ. The term for this declaration is *justification*. When we are justified, we are “saved.” In a more general sense, however, salvation includes both the event and the process (Phil 2:12). Our personal righteousness is necessary (Jm 2:14, 20), but it does not justify us. We are justified by faith alone (Rom 5:1).

Chapter 2 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- Judge – to make an assessment; to resolve or determine – to pronounce, rule, or contend in a dispute
- Truth – objective, unbiased facts (unlike our biased judgments)
- Contempt – the despise, ignore, think nothing of (3rd commandment concerning God’s name)
- Persistence – steadfast, constancy, endurance
- Self-seeking – out of intrigue, partisanship, fractiousness (contentious)
- Reject truth – not allowing ourselves to be persuaded; unbelief; disobedience
- Follow evil – persuaded by it; yielding to injustice or unrighteousness

Principles – vv 2:1-12. When we judge others under the law, we condemn ourselves who are also under the law. God’s grace is provided to remove the condemnation of the law and lead us toward *repentance*. We judge others out of stubbornness and an unrepentant heart. Whether we do good or evil, we are self-motivated. In doing good, it’s OK to seek glory, honor, and even eternal life. In doing evil, however, we seek to satisfy the self at the expense of others, ignoring what God teaches through his law. We engage in intrigues, seek favorable alliances, and create factions. We reject the truth, and yield to unrighteousness – which leads to God’s wrath and anger.

The role that the law plays in what we do is that it identifies sin (Rom 7:7). That brings both curses (guilt and condemnation) and blessings (forgiveness and peace). Without the law to identify sin, I wouldn’t know right from wrong. Without the guilt of sin and condemnation of the law, God’s grace wouldn’t manifest itself. Without grace I wouldn’t know the love of God. Therefore, the law is good; it has been given to lead me to God’s grace and love which are found in Jesus Christ.

Implications – When I judge someone, when I’m critical of them, I am pushing God aside and setting myself in his place. I am asking to be judged alongside them, by the same standard of law. I don’t judge because I want to uphold the law, as I’d like to believe. Verse 5 says that I judge when I’m being hard, stubborn, and unrepentant. Instead, I should seek to be persuaded of God’s truth, and strive to be obedient myself – getting the log out before judging anyone else (Lk 6:42). Such a pursuit of personal obedience should be constant, in the expectant hope that I will be glorified in the day of his coming (2Th 1:10-12).

Judging others, it seems to me, is nothing more than a veiled attempt to justify ourselves. It’s a way to say, “Look at me! I’m being good today. I deserve your admiration and awe for being relatively better than someone else.” Judging, along with the frustration and anger it produces, saps our energy. If we rest in the Spirit and allow him to speak to us, and through us, we aren’t so concerned with what others are doing, with baseless comparisons between their behavior and our own. We can learn to encourage and empower them, to seek their good instead of promoting ourselves. We can live at peace with them, with ourselves, and with God.

Chapter 2 – Part 2*Key words and phrases –*

- Obey – to perform or do
- Conscience – conscious of; the moral soul
- Thoughts – Gr. *logismos*: reason, logic
- Defending them – the manuscripts read, “defending one another”
- My gospel – Paul’s revealed mystery that Gentiles are fellow-heirs with Jews
- Know (his will) – to learn
- Approve – recognize, test, or examine for genuine quality or trueness
- Embodiment (of knowledge and truth) – a form of (see 2Tim 3:5)³
- Rob temples – commit sacrilege (to profane or desecrate what is sacred)

Principles – We cannot be justified by obeying the law because righteousness requires perfect obedience, and we cannot perfectly obey. The effect of the law is that it causes our conscience to accuse or defend us. Adherence to the law develops a moral compass in us and in our children. Thus there are those with a “weak conscience” (1Cor 8:10-12), and those with a seared conscience (1Tim 4:2) – they are permanently branded with the accusation of sin. However, if we choose to rely on and teach the law as if we were experts, then we need to obey the law ourselves, understanding its requirements and bearing its burdens. We must not be hypocrites. When we cannot bear the burden, we want to waive the requirements of the law. Instead of being Spirit-dependent, we stop pursuing obedience. We become tolerant of sin when we should be reproving, correcting, and training one another in righteousness. But when we are too insistent on obedience, we become harsh and condemnatory, instead of gracious and forgiving. It’s a fine balance.

When believers sin, we dishonor God and his law. We cause God’s name (his reputation) to be blasphemed among non-believers. They believe our faith has no power over sin, so they think our faith is misplaced or unfounded. Circumcision means we are identified as God’s people, not by law-keeping itself, but by submitting to the Spirit through faith, which leads to law-keeping. It’s a matter of what we depend on. Law-keeping is a *means* of glorifying God. It is not an *end* in itself (“not by the written code” – Rom 2:29). Then what role does the law play in circumcision of the heart? It motivates us by triggering our conscience, stimulating us to obey God’s will. The Law was given for our good, and not just to condemn us. Our sanctification requires the Law if we are to be “cleansed.” Our motivation for personal obedience must not come from fear of punishment (to appease God’s wrath), but to receive praise from God (Jn 5:30; Ga 6:8; 1Th 2:4); we seek his praise in obeying, not the praise of men in sinning (Jn 12:43; Gal 1:5). Recall Rom 1:32 in which men approve one another’s sinful practices to affirm their own.

Implications – Unless we raise our children to know right from wrong by teaching them the law, they will grow up with a weak or even missing conscience. The conscience must be intentionally constructed in each of us as a moral compass. When a society allows “North” to be a matter of personal choice, its people are set adrift at sea without an anchor or point of reference. That’s America today.

Obedience isn’t comparative obedience – this isn’t a contest. The only one I’m to compare myself to is Christ (Gal 6:3-5). If I judge, I will be judged (Mt 7:1). There are non-believers who may be more righteous than I (Jer 3:11). And yet, my obedience honors God, and my disobedience desecrates his holy name; it also profanes his holy temple in me (1Cor 6:19; Rom 2:22). “Be holy, for I am holy.” Lev 11:45

³ Those who depend on the law, and try to enforce its requirements on everyone else, only have a form of godliness in the law. They proclaim and adhere to it out of their reliance on works, not grace. It doesn’t drive them to Christ, but to judgment.

Chapter 3 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- Prevail – Gr. *nikao*: conquer or overcome; Heb. *tsadaq*: to make right in a legal sense.
- Falsehood – a fabrication or lie
- Understands – to bring together (in the mind, or in mutual agreement)
- Worthless – unprofitable; useless
- Ruin – what is broken or shattered; a fracture

Principles – When God judges me before the throne as a believer, I am not condemned – because Christ has paid my debt (Isa 53:6: “He has laid on him the iniquity of us all”); nor will I lose my salvation – but despite these things, I am not exempted from obedience in this life, and it will be considered at the Judgment (parable of the talents – Mt 25:15+). Rom 8:1, “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ, *who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*” We could say that our “falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness,” meaning it brings out God’s righteousness clearly; but Paul says that concluding we may therefore continue in our sin would be a “slandrous” statement.

Our sin or our obedience does not affect God, in the sense of changing his attitude towards us, or his intent to uphold his justice. In other words, we cannot manipulate his response by what we do or don’t do. But it is freeing to know that our relationship with him is not jeopardized by our sin – the bond of love he has towards us is everlasting. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just...” 1Jn 1:9

And yet we justify our sin in any number of ways: I’m right, everyone else is wrong. It’s not all the time, and my behavior is getting better. Others don’t deserve grace and mercy from me. I’m not affecting anyone but myself. The Bible says, “against you only have I sinned...” Ps 51:4. We *always* offend God.

The reverse of depravity: They understand and seek God; they all have turned toward him and found usefulness; they all do good, every one; their throats are fountains of life, their tongues practice truth. Words of life are on their lips. Their mouths are full of praise and hope; their feet are swift to preserve life; unity and joy mark their ways and the way of peace they know. The fear of God is always before their eyes.

Implications – My faith is not just to cover my sin, but to empower my obedience. Of myself, there is nothing good in me (Ps 16:2). But I am no longer of myself, but of Christ. Because I am in Christ, and because he lives in me (1Jn 3:24), I can do all things (Phil 4:3) – even obey. It will not be perfect obedience, or meritorious obedience, but it will be sufficient and fruitful enough to glorify God. And so I choose this day to be gracious and merciful, because of Christ.

Chapter 3 – Part 2

Key words and phrases –

- Held accountable – to become guilty (under judgment; indebted; liable)
- Conscious – Gr. *epignosis*: to know precisely (come to know or understand; learn exactly)
- Fall short – to be found lacking; fail to qualify
- Glory – approval from another
- Sacrifice of atonement – Gr. *hilasterion*: propitiation; expiation; appeasement

Principles – All have sinned and failed to qualify for God’s approval. Therefore, we need Christ. The purpose of the law is to give us specific knowledge of right and wrong. Under the law, we become guilty in the sight of God. Perfect righteousness can only come from God; never from ourselves. The status of righteousness is granted to us through our faith in Christ’s atoning work, and trusting that the righteous life of Christ is considered by God to be our own.

When Paul says “there is no difference” it can mean that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; it can also mean there is no difference between the imputed righteousness we have, and the actual righteousness which belongs to Christ. It covers Jew and Gentile alike. We are justified because of Christ’s life and atoning sacrifice. We become justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

The function of Christ’s sacrifice was to appease the wrath of God so that it “passes over” us without destroying us. It purchased back our life, blood for blood. Blood is necessary to atone for the soul because the life is in the blood, and therefore it substitutes for the life at risk. It cleanses the temple of the body (1Cor 6:11). Faith receives the benefit of this offering. Faith obtains the grace that is freely offered to us in Christ by the Father – it ushers us into the kingdom to receive the gift of salvation, thus negating any boasting we might make about our accomplishments.

Implications – The law hasn’t been done away with – only its penalty. The law identifies and clarifies my great need of and constant dependence on Christ. It reveals the justice, righteousness, and holiness of God. But when I look at the law under grace in the same way that I looked at it apart from Christ, I despoil its value, and submit to it, and rely on it, instead of relying on Christ alone. I fall back under its condemnation. The righteousness I have in Christ is apart from the law. I must never be obedient out of fear of punishment, or because I want to “take charge” of my life or my behavior by an act of will.

Watchman Nee writes,

That which violates the law is the flesh, and that which attempts to keep the law is also the flesh. The life and fruit of the Spirit are not of the flesh; rather, they are of the Spirit. Thus, they are beyond the reach of the law. If you try to keep the law, it is your flesh that attempts it. And as the law enters in, the Holy Spirit ceases to be active... We do not need to keep the law, yet we have the righteousness required by the law. *This* is the Gospel... The righteousness of God comes to us through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. We have been joined with Christ. Whoever would go back to the law in an attempt to try to please God becomes an adulteress.

Sin is a power that holds people... The Word of God does not tell us to overcome sin, though it does tell us that we can be freed, or delivered, from sin... One cannot be delivered from sin by exercising his will, for when one is using his willpower, he is unable to trust God’s way for deliverance. Hence, God is forced to wait for that day when this one can confess his utter inability and fully submit himself to God’s ability. Only when one has come to the point when he stops trying in his own strength does God then have the opportunity of providing victory for him.

Chapter 4 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- Transgressions – Gr. *anomia*: wickedness; acts against the law; lawlessness
- Credited – reckoned or considered as
- Forgiven – released; sent away; dismissed
- Covered – not ignored, but paid
- Boast– to glory in or relish
- Work – to labor, exercise, produce
- Wages/Obligation – what is owed; debt

Principles – Whatever we have comes by the grace of God in whom we boast. If we boast in ourselves, it is only within the area of influence which God assigns to us (1Cor 3:5; 7:17; 2Cor 10:13). God promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars, or the sands on the shore. We are the heirs and the fulfillment of that promise. God promises to show us mercy, that HS comes upon us with power, that our sins are forgiven, and that God dwells with us. He is both transcendent and immanent.

If our righteousness was earned like wages, then God would be indebted to us, instead of us being indebted to God for his unmerited grace. It would reverse our positions. And yet his precious gift is not a debt that needs to be cleared or paid back. It doesn't lead to shame or guilt, but to joy and thanksgiving. Otherwise it wouldn't be a gift. Because his righteousness is a gift, it covers all of his children equally and without distinction. The distinctive circumcision of the Jews couldn't earn it, and the uncircumcision of the Gentiles could not disqualify them from it. Circumcision is an after-the-fact sign of faith. It seals the covenant between God and his people.⁴ Baptism (unmentioned here) is the sign of the believer's faith, sealing him or her in Christ's covenant. It doesn't save; it only signifies salvation.

Baptism also signifies receiving the Holy Spirit in power, the kind of power which leads us to "walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had." Abraham *act*-ually believed the promise. He didn't just say that he believed it. And he demonstrated his belief time and again: in leaving his home, in offering Isaac, and in a number of other ways. We too have our faith "tested" from time to time as a reminder of our covenant with God.

Implications – One who is baptized but doesn't walk in the footsteps of faith hasn't repented. This person is always learning but unable to arrive at knowledge of the truth, corrupted in his mind and disqualified (fallen short) regarding the faith. Such people tend to preach a different gospel, and seek personal gain by what they preach. They are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles but they are actually servants of Satan – lovers of self and of money: proud, arrogant, abusive, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, and conceited. They have a form of godliness, but they deny its power.

Therefore we strive to show ourselves workmen who are approved in the sight of God (2Tim 2:15). We work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). And yet our dependence is never on what we do, but on who we are, because of God's grace.

⁴ Every covenant contained a clause concerning the witness to the covenant. A witness was a perpetual reminder that the covenant existed. In Abram's case, God asked that he and all his male descendants who entered into the covenant carry the reminder of the covenant in their own flesh. Circumcision was done on the outward flesh, but it represented the acceptance of the covenant in the mind, including the willingness to obey the laws within the covenant. "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (Deut 10:16). It meant that they were to remove their stubborn sinful thoughts from their minds, purge sin from their lives and become obedient to the laws of God. "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut 30:6).

Chapter 4 – Part 2

Key words and phrases –

- Promise – an announcement or profession of what will be done
- Heirs – those who receive what has been allotted to them (the allotment of land to the tribes)
- No value – void, empty, useless, without force
- Guaranteed – stable, fast, firm, sure, trusty
- Hope – firm expectation of the good thing that is to come
- Not weakening in his faith – (lit. impotent) maintaining full strength or virility⁵
- Waver through unbelief – (passive tense) withdrawn, disengaged, staggered, caused to doubt
- Fully persuaded – fully clothed, carried, or held up (with conviction)⁶

Principles – God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of many nations – the world is his just as it was Adam’s, and it is now ours as ambassadors of Christ: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” Mat 28:18-20

If we depended on our obedience to the law, our faith would have no effect; in effect, we would be trying to become heirs by our own hand instead of being heirs according to the covenantal promise of God. It is a gracious declaration of our inherited estate because of the death of Christ, the testator; it is not a debt that is owed to us and to be paid by God out of obligation (recall 4:4). The law shows our great need of Christ because it defines our great sinfulness, proving that our works *cannot* make us heirs. Only the blood of Christ can cover the debt of our sins.

Faith has enormous value for the believer. It obtains the promise guaranteed to *all* of Abraham’s spiritual offspring – not just Jews (children of the Law) but also Gentiles (children by faith). For God’s grace gives life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. He calls us his children though we were not, righteous though we were not, and heirs though we were not – because in Christ we *are* all these things.

We don’t need to rustle up sufficient faith for ourselves. God’s promise, and our trust in *his* faithfulness, is enough to strengthen our own faith. Abraham did not have “instant” faith that God’s unlikely promise would be fulfilled. There was a track record that had been demonstrated over a lifetime. And knowing God, Abraham may not have known *how* God would fulfill it, but he figured he would (see Heb. 11:17-19). We are to believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead, that he delivered Jesus over to death for our sins, and that he raised him to life again for our justification.

Implications – Faith is our *only* way to receive the promise of an inheritance in the kingdom. We are to be fully persuaded of God’s power to deliver us and to credit Christ’s righteousness to us, just as he delivered Christ to the cross for our sins, and delivered him from the grave for our justification.

Sidebar question: what is a *carnal* Christian? See 1 Cor 3:1-4. It simply means behaving as if we aren’t saved. We follow the desires of the flesh more than the desires of the Spirit. Some think it means we lose our salvation, or become so “back-slidden” that we must be re-saved. Most theologians reject such an idea as dualistic heresy.⁷ Sin cannot un-save a faithful believer. The NIV translates *sarkikos* as “worldly” rather than “carnal” (or “fleshly”). When we get to chapters 7 and 8 we’ll learn more about the contest between the flesh and the spirit. Remember, in Christ the sinful *nature* is dead (that is, its mastery over us is ended), but the desires of the flesh remain.

⁵ A play on words – though seemingly impotent in his body at 100 years of age, he was not impotent in his faith.

⁶ This doesn’t mean beyond a shadow of a doubt, but sufficiently persuaded to act confidently upon what we believe (see Dan 3:17-18).

⁷ Dualism means everything of the flesh is evil and everything of the spirit is good. Being fleshly would then mean being unsaved.

Chapter 5 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- Perseverance – steadfastness, constancy, endurance, patience
- Character – what is proven or approved by testing; a specimen of worth and genuineness
- Hope – anticipation; joyful or pleasurable expectation – here, of God’s approval and exaltation
- Poured out – KJV: shed abroad; the love poured into us by the HS spills over to others
- Suffering – tribulation; oppression; affliction (here it refers to pressures and stress)
- Reconciled – to be received back into favor by one we have offended; exchanged currency.
- Rejoice in God – to boast in or celebrate

Principles – By faith we gain peace with God and access to his grace. We rejoice in our sufferings because we live under grace, and we have received peace. Knowing what we have through Christ, and treasuring it, our suffering is incidental to our eternal calling, and instrumental in our present growth in the knowledge of Christ, and of his suffering. If we think our suffering is pointless, we crumble under its pressure and weight. But knowing that it has been brought to us to strengthen us, to teach us, and to provide an opportunity to testify of our treasures and resources in Christ, we are better able to embrace this gift (see next page: lyrics to “*This Thorn*” by Twila Paris). Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance then produces character (see definition above); and out of our character we find hope. James 1:2-4 teaches that trials produce perseverance, and perseverance brings fulfillment, and fulfillment results in completeness – we are not lacking in anything; we become mature by our suffering and trials.

Such hope in what is to come, and contentment with what has already been bestowed, never disappoints or embarrasses us because we are filled with the HS: there’s no room for such things. The Spirit is our Helper and our Comforter. We are not ashamed of Christ or his gospel (Lk 9:26; Rom 1:16). Therefore, opposition to the faith and hope we have cannot shame us either – or it isn’t truly faith and hope.

Knowing our completely helpless estate, God condescended to do for us what we could not do for ourselves – for which he is due all glory, laud, and honor. The idea that anyone might sacrifice himself for a good or righteous person, pales by comparison to someone good and righteous laying down his life for his enemy. Yet that is exactly what Christ did. It is mind-boggling. In fact, some of us refuse to accept it completely. We fear that we aren’t worthy, that we aren’t good enough for such grace, or that it is inadequate for us. Paul pleads with us that if we’ve been justified, then of course we’ll be saved from wrath. If as his enemies God reconciled us to himself by the death of his son, then of course as his children we’ll be saved by his life. To think that such a gift is ineffectual for us is prideful. “I’m different. I require special action beyond what Christ has done on my behalf on the cross. His sacrifice is inadequate to purge me of my sin and shame, or to empower me to live a life worthy of a child of God.” Such an assertion is a rejection of the cleansing and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. It is actually a continuing rebellion. Instead of desiring to prove our faith to God, we are in effect asking God to prove his faithfulness to us – we rely on our emotions instead of relying on God’s promises.

Paul rejects such an idea. The death and righteousness of Christ has procured reconciliation for those who believe in him: he has obtained eternal peace, hope, and salvation. That’s a fact. We were justified on the cross, we are reconciled in the present, and we will be saved from God’s wrath in the future. That’s because the promises of God, contained in the gospel, have been sealed with the blood of Christ. The benefits which flow from Christ’s Last Will and Testament for his people are irrevocable. That is our great hope, borne by faith, ensured by the Holy Spirit, and proclaimed by God while we were still his enemies. What love is this, that God would procure for himself a righteous people out of such unworthy vessels? It is incomprehensible, but it is nonetheless true. Therefore, stand firm in your faith.

This Thorn

By Twila Paris

Thank you for this thorn embedded in my flesh
I can feel the mystery my spirit is made fresh
You are sovereign still and forever wise
I can see the miracle opening my eyes
To a proud heart so quick to judge
Laying down crosses and carrying grudges
The veil has been torn
And I thank you for this thorn

Thank you for this thorn - fellowship of pain
Teaching me to know you more, never to complain
Thank You for this love planted in my side
Faithful patient miracle opening my eyes
I never thought I'd say it without reservation
But I am truly grateful for this piercing revelation
Of a proud heart - so quick to judge
Laying down crosses and carrying grudges
The veil has been torn
And I thank you for this thorn

And if You chose to take it, I will praise You
And thank You for the healing in your name
But if it must remain, I thank You for Your rod
Evidence of Father-love for a child of God
I join you in sorrow
So much less than You have borne
And I thank you
Really I thank You Lord
I thank You

I thank You for this thorn

Sidebar - What follows here is the result of a short discussion I instigated during our group meeting on Chapter 5. It is so easy to get off track in our service to God. It is the context of "suffering" in Romans 5, or what some translations call "tribulation." Is there any difference between the hardships we endure for Christ, and the personal suffering we encounter in a fallen world? Not if we keep Christ as the focus of everything we do and experience in life. Suffering is not some separate thing, independent of our relationship to God through Christ. The comfort of the Spirit isn't available only if we're experiencing opposition for Christ's sake. He is there to comfort us in our joyful declaration of the sovereignty of God in all things. In all of Job's trials, he did not sin, because in all of his trials he acknowledged the right of God to do what he wills, and he never questioned the goodness of God in any of it.

Sometimes we think that suffering is detached from our relationship to Christ. It's one thing to suffer for the cause of Christ and be persecuted for our faith. To simply suffer as our "tribulation," without any obvious purpose to it, can seem a waste of our energy and potential. We can think it impedes our service to God, or it interferes with our calling. We're convinced that we have things we can do to obtain God's favor and his approval, and our suffering is an obstacle to that. We can even be tempted to think we're competing with other believers to do great things for God. Paul reminds us of what has been eternally settled: our justification, our reconciliation with God, and our deliverance from his wrath come Judgment Day.

What we encounter on our journey, whether it is a benefit or a trial, is not meant to unsettle what has been settled. We are not meant to come unglued by any of it. Instead, we are to stand firm in our faith and trust in the promises of God. What we have from God is permanent and unchangeable, because we are dearly loved. In the context of God's great and sure promises, the atonement and resurrection of Christ, and the work of the Spirit, everything necessary for our salvation has been completed. While we are called to be obedient, and to proclaim the Gospel, we cannot get more approval than what we already have. Paul states emphatically that we were weak and powerless when Christ laid down his life for us. That's why he laid down his life for us. There was no other solution, and certainly none that we could offer ourselves. We were weak and powerless in our rebellion and sin, and we remain weak and powerless apart from Christ. "Apart from me you can do *nothing*."

This incapacity should not frustrate us, but encourage us. It is not a cause for woe and sorrow that we cannot toot our own horn. It's a cause for rejoicing in the grace and might of God, the Almighty One. It brings peace and rest, not anxiety and unrest. When we begin to think that God is dependent on our works to further his kingdom, when we begin to seek our crowns like wages that are due us for services rendered, when we begin to compare ourselves to one another as if we're in competition, we lose our rest, our peace, our perseverance, and our hope. We take a burden on our own shoulders that does not belong there and cannot be borne by any one of us. It is Christ's burden, Christ's will, Christ's work, and Christ's glory. Any time we seek the glory for ourselves instead of for him, we separate ourselves from the vine that nourishes and sustains us. We lose our strength and vigor. Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath, not some hard taskmaster that we strive to please out of fear that we may not measure up. We are to take his yoke upon us, for it is easy, and his burden is light. That's because he's the one who's carrying it, not us.

Chapter 5 – Part 2

Key words and phrases –

- Sin – straying from the designated path; breaking the law; missing the mark; an attitude of rebellion towards God (Sin with a big “S”, rather than sin with a little “s”). Sin is not the separate or even the accumulated instances of law-breaking (sins). It is a pattern of indifference that leads to sins; it is “despising” God and his Word (2Sam 12:9; Matt 6:24). When sin dominates us, disobedience has become a habit, a repeated unwillingness to consider God’s will in the matters of our life.
- Pattern – Gr. *tupos*: the mark left by a stroke or blow, like a footprint left in the sand.
- Grace... overflowed (“abounded” NKJV) – exceeding a fixed measure, abundant.
- Reign – the exercise of sovereign power; dominance, widespread influence.

Principles – Sin, and man’s knowledge of right and wrong (a.k.a. “the law”), were ushered in with Adam’s breaking of God’s command not to eat of the fruit of the tree. It was written on our hearts long before God’s promise that we would obey what was written there (Jer 31:33; Rom 2:15). So we have had an understanding of God’s will even before the law had been given to Moses. There was an attitude of rebellion or self-elevation against God from the very beginning (as with Nimrod at the Tower of Babel). That’s why sin is said to have “entered the world through one man.” It reigned over our fathers, and thus death came to all of us. Adam was a reverse-image of Christ. The word for “pattern” suggests a mold for the rest of us, an imprint of what was to come in Jesus Christ. He would fill the void in the mold, mirroring in goodness what Adam had bequeathed to us in death and corruption.

Many died because of Adam’s trespass, but God’s grace and the gift of Christ overflowed to many. Adam’s offense was selfish, but Christ’s sacrifice was selfless; his deed was done out of rebellion, but Christ’s out of submission; his out of pride, but Christ’s out of humility; his out of disobedience, but Christ’s out of obedience. Adam’s sin brought judgment, which led to condemnation, and the reign of death for all his offspring. But the gift of Christ brought justification, which led to righteousness, by which those who receive that gift by faith reign in life through Jesus Christ.

The law is not evil, but good – it not only defines sin, but it reflects God’s holiness. It is a lamp to light our path so that we may walk in a way pleasing to God, and beneficial to one another. Grace reigns only through righteousness, never through sinfulness, and never through the law. Grace and the law are “mutually exclusive.” Grace is God’s sovereignty at work in us by the power of the Spirit to will and to act according to his purposes. That is how we reign in life. Grace should dominate a Christian the way sin dominates an unbeliever. It should characterize us in a visible way through obedient behavior, and loving kindness towards others.

Implications – I may have inherited death through Adam, but I have inherited life through Jesus Christ. God’s abundant provision of grace and his gift of righteousness, enable me to reign in this life through Christ, who is the author and finisher of my faith (Heb 12:2). I am the beneficiary and inheritor of a better covenant, found in the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. He laid down his life for me. I therefore have all the grace I need to reign in this life in a way glorifying to God, if I will only be true to who I am in Christ, and what I have received by the Spirit.

Chapter 6 – Part 1

Key words and phrases –

- Baptized⁸ into Christ – we each publicly declared our identification with Christ
- Baptized into his death – we also publicly committed that our old man is now dead to us.
- Old Self – lit. “ancient⁹ man”; it refers to our old life, or by implication, original sin.
- Instruments – tools or weapons employed to produce a desired end. We’re unemployed by sin.¹⁰
- Alive to God – living¹¹ to God or “as to” God – with him in mind, living for him.
- Will live with him – hyphenated “with-live”; it suggests there is no life apart from Christ, but also that with Christ there is no death, nor any of its activities. The future tense is only to contrast with *past* death; this definite condition (will live) of ongoing life with Christ is ours today and forever.
- Mortal Body – an existence that is subject to death, and will come to an end, like sin.
- Master – the Greek word is *kurios*, or “lord” – the same word used of God and of Christ
- Reign – exercising the rights of a king

Principles – If we died to sin, and publicly declared that we consider ourselves dead to it, then why do we continue to sin? It may be simple weakness of character that we may overcome with time. But too often, sin is either a conscious choice, or an unwitting habit. We just didn’t think about it. We let our mind wander from the truth of God. And when it’s willful, it’s like we have an innate desire to declare our independence from God’s grace, to stake out a plot of land to call our own. It’s also possible that God allows us to sin as a reminder of our weakness, and of our great need for his grace and mercy. Otherwise we might become self-righteous. That’s why confession and asking God’s forgiveness are crucial to our Christian walk. In confession, we examine our ways, and compare them to God’s intent for us. We are not putting ourselves back under the law. Rather we are acknowledging our true identity in Christ.

We were raised in Christ so that we may live a *new* life, and no longer be slaves to sin. Union with Christ is a pledge from God, and a demonstration of our own firm hope, that we will continue our union past the death of this mortal body and into eternity. Sin is not to be our lord and master because it contradicts that union; only God is our Lord (Ex. 20:3). The NIV reads, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body...” Yet this isn’t a command; it is a *declaration*. It reads literally, “Sin consequently is not king in your mortal body for you to obey it in its cravings.” Verse 10 reads, “Who then died, died to sin once; but who lives, lives to God.” It suggests that we don’t die to sin more than once; we died to it in the past, and we’re now living to God. There is no going back, nor is there a repeated cycle of sin and salvation in our lives.

Sinning is occasionally stumbling on the path. It should no longer be the habit and the pattern of our life. Otherwise sin would be our master. In sinning habitually, sin is the master, and in mastering sin, we are the master. We no longer report to sin for duty, nor indulge the desires of the flesh (Eph. 2:3). Rather, we take every thought captive, and bring it into obedience to Christ (2Cor 10:5) We don’t steal from the till, punish the innocent, abandon widows and orphans, give false testimony, or co-conspire in wickedness by remaining silent or indifferent to it. We are pledged to Christ and so we serve him and his purposes.

Implications – The desires of our flesh are very real. But they are only desires, not mandates. As they lure and entice us (Jam. 1:14), we must remember that we are now *dead* to sin. Its mastery over us is broken. We are free not to indulge the flesh or serve sin. Instead, we choose to serve Christ, our one true Lord.

⁸ Baptism is an outward sign which can be seen, of an inward change which cannot be seen. It is a sign of cleansing and purification. “In baptism, believers profess to be dead to sin and to the world, and they obligate themselves to live to righteousness” – John Gill

⁹ The Greek is *palaaios*, from which we get paleontology, the study of dinosaurs. Through Adam (the ancient man?) sin enters each of us at birth.

¹⁰ In other words, the way we live can either be used to further sin, or to further righteousness. That involves a choice (Josh 24:15).

¹¹ The Greek is present tense, and indicates ongoing activity (the verb has an “ing” ending)

Chapter 6 – Part 2*Key words and phrases –*

- Offer – to present oneself, or to stand by as a waiter, ready to serve¹²
- Form – a pattern or imprint (Rom 5:14)
- Entrusted – delivered or given to someone (for their benefit and protection)
- Natural selves – within the limits of our nature
- Holiness – consecration or sanctification, set apart for special use (clean or pure)
- Free from the control of righteousness – freeborn; not bound to righteousness – the implication is that we are now bound to righteousness (as our master) because we were “born again” into it.
- Righteousness – integrity, right-thinking (leading to right behavior), virtuous
- Wholeheartedly – out of the heart entirely; the point from which action proceeds
- Obey – attentive harkening
- Wages vs. gift – the one is earned and owed, the other is freely given out of grace

Principles – We are not to offer ourselves to sin to be ordered about by it. We are freeborn from it and we are therefore no longer until a compulsion to serve it. Instead, we have been newborn into slavery to serve righteousness. We were given into the service of a pattern of teaching established by Christ, to serve it willingly and obediently, just as any slave would serve a loving master. This pattern of teaching not only formed us, but it has been given into our care to ensure that the original pattern, made in the image of Christ, is not replaced, marred, cracked, or employed for personal gain.¹³ What we were taught and what delivered us is to remain the same from generation to generation as others are transformed into the image of Christ by the renewing of their minds according to that original pattern or mold. We are conformed to the divine will in thought, purpose, and action.

Righteousness is not merely the absence of sin. It is actively and intentionally doing what is right and pleasing in God’s sight. It is doing his will wholeheartedly. It becomes habitual in the same way that sin becomes habitual. We become increasingly “accustomed to doing what is [right].”¹⁴ Each act of righteousness leads to another. When we sin, the fruit we harvest is a shameful vapor, and its end is death. But we have a harvest from God’s grace that moves us towards holiness, and its end is eternal life.

Being freed from sin means being born into righteousness. There is no middle or neutral ground to call our own. We either serve sin, or we serve righteousness; we either serve Satan’s purposes or God’s purposes. The righteousness of Christ is considered our righteousness through faith. And thus we serve it as we would serve Christ because it is his will that we do so, just as it was his Father’s will that he did so.¹⁵ As it was Christ’s work so it is ours because we are united with Christ in fact and not in theory. The love of Christ and the gift of his righteousness compel us to be righteous, and constrain us from unrighteousness (Mt 6:33; 2Cor 5:14).

Implications – The pattern of Christ that transformed us by the power of the Holy Spirit was designed to produce holiness in us, to cleanse and consecrate us for God’s use according to his purposes.¹⁶ We are his holy temple in which he abides if we obey his commands (1Cor 3:16; Jn 15:4-10; 1Jn 2:24-28). And yet, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light, because by grace he is the one who carries it (Matt 11:29-30), and we live under its shelter.

¹² There is a difference between a slave and a steward in American thinking. But the Bible speaks of a slave as a thinking, responsible agent who is always looking to serve the needs and desires of his master. It is not someone who only does what he is told (Lk 17:10).

¹³ See 1Tim 6:3-5; 2Tim 4:1-5; Tit 1:9; 2:1

¹⁴ the reverse of Jer. 13:23; see Mat 5:19; 7:24-26; 23:23; Lk 8:21

¹⁵ Mat 28:20; Jn 15:10; 17:3-8; 1Cor 1:2; Eph 1:4; Heb 12:14; 1Pet 1:15-16; Rev 22:11

¹⁶ Heb 12:14; 1Thess 4:4,7; 2Thess 2:13; 1Pet 1:2

Chapter 7 – Part 1

The key verses to look at here are 4-6: “you... died to the law **that you might belong to another...** that we might bear fruit to God, ...so **that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.**” There are two ideas going on here that are related to our Christian “walk in the Spirit,” which is one of the most challenging aspects of following Christ. The first idea is that we have this overpowering urge to somehow *certify* ourselves to God. Now, the Scripture does encourage us to make our calling and election sure (Heb 6:11; 2Pet 1:10), and to show ourselves to be workmen approved to God (2Tim 2:15). But it can push us to the point that we pursue obedience for its own sake and fall back under the law and death (Gal 5:1), or in frustration we may reject obedience altogether (Rom 6:1-2 – *antinomianism*), and thus encounter death (Jms 2:26).

The second idea is that we feel inadequate to receive the love of God; we condemn ourselves even though God no longer condemns us (Rom 8:1). We feel as though God loves us (Jer 31:33), but he probably doesn't *like* us very much. Who are we that God should consider us at all? This is Job's lament in Job 7:17-21, that God tests him each day. And yet it is David's great delight (Ps 8:4-5). I suspect we fear that we may be unable to withstand the testing (1Cor 10:13), thus we doubt God's concern for us. We look at him as a stern schoolmaster instead of a loving teacher. We want desperately to be a finished work, not a work-in-progress, someone who makes right choices each time instead of learning by mistakes. We want instant, visible change. We cannot see the finished product in our head. We cannot see where God is leading us. And so we demand a roadmap and signposts along the way. Like an unfinished puzzle, we wonder where the pieces fit, and when the image will be complete. We forget that God knows our frame (Psalm 103:14), that he chooses which pieces to put in place at which times, and the tempo at which to fit those pieces together. He is not a charlatan who hides pieces to frustrate us. He knows what the finished image will look like. He assembles us in the womb (Ps 139:13), and he will complete us (Phil 1:6).

So how do we avoid these two tendencies to return to works or to reject God's grace? The essence of Christian obedience is found in the word “*belong*” – the Greek would read, “so that you might become another's.” We may not *feel* like we belong to him, or we may fail to draw near to him and give ourselves to him completely. Imagine a marriage or other relationship in which some things we do draw us near to one another, and other things we do push us apart. We can fail to consider the other's feelings or desires; we may act as though we don't need them; we tease or badger one another; we judge, criticize, or condemn; we fail to forgive those we love for perceived wrongs; we doubt the other, and so we fall prey to bitterness and resentment – all of which poison our relationships. Which things draw us near to God and which things separate us from him, and from the Body of Christ? See Heb. 7:19; 10:19-23.

Read Eph 5:15-33. Do you consider your ways? Is there a song in your heart dedicated to God? David dedicated himself to God intentionally in Ps. 63. Take time to read of David's heart there. Those who belong to God hear his voice (Jn 6:47). It is a voice we hear by the Spirit primarily through the Bible (Ps 119). Have you closed your ears to God's voice by failing to read the Scripture, and listening intently for his words of love toward you? Or do you wrestle with God for independence and self-gratification in the areas of finance, food, sex, or other things which you substitute for God as the primary object of desire? We want self-sufficiency, not dependence; control, not trust. How can you tell if you are giving or not giving control to God and bearing him fruit? How important is that to you and why? Are you convinced that God can be trusted enough to give yourself to him, completely? Read 2Tim 1:8-14. Does that call you to follow Christ? If not, why not? Do you doubt that God loves you? Read Ex. 3:7 – do you believe that God loves you as much as he loved Israel, so that he sent a redeemer to deliver you from bondage?

And that brings us to the questions raised in Rom 7:2-3. Who are the first husband, second husband, and the wife? *Who do we belong to?* The reign of sin (Ro 6:12), bondage to sin (Ro 6:6), the body of sin (Eph 4:22), or our corrupt nature (Col 3:9) is now *dead*. We have been joined to Christ (Re 21:9; Isa 62:5; Mt 9:15). We are the elect who comprise the invisible Church, his Bride (Jn 3:29; Rev 21:2,9; 22:17).

Chapter 7 – Part 2

In Rom 7:12-25 Paul describes a contest or struggle. The question here is whether this is a past struggle or a current struggle. As I footnoted in the questions for chapter 7, some commentators believe chapter 7 is our life apart from Christ as a non-believer, while chapter 8 describes our life in Christ, as a believer. The problem is that it is all present-tense. Others believe chapter 7 describes our life in Christ, but as a “carnal” Christian, a rebellious believer. This is hard to believe about Paul. *There is a third possibility*. If chapter 7 does describe our current life *in Christ*, then how are we delivered from this “body of death” as Paul portrays it in verse 25? Does “body” refer to our own body? Is it the collection of things which smell of death, just as we might speak of a body of truth? These definitions don’t make sense here. It’s helpful to know that it was a Roman practice to strap a dead body to the back of prisoners accused of any crime which carried a death penalty.

In Christ, we are *no longer* in bondage to sin, bound by the law, and having no choice in the matter. Nonetheless, Paul says he is “sold as a slave to sin” in v 14. Who sold him after Christ freed him? It is our experience and Paul’s admission that his fleshly desires are still present. It is his *bondage* to them that has been broken; the *condemnation* which flows from them has been removed. That bondage died when he was buried with Christ (v 6:8). And when he was resurrected with Christ, all charges against him were dropped. They were nailed to the cross with Christ, and they are no longer held over him (Col 2:12-14). The Romans used to nail a list of charges over a prisoner’s cell to identify his crimes. That list has now been removed, assigned to Christ, and the cell door is therefore unlocked. We are *freed*. **And yet there is this struggle**. There is this ongoing inability on our part to overcome the desires of the flesh, regardless of the desires of the mind. The body of death, the carcass, is carried about – as if we missed it and would resuscitate it if we could. We hold onto it and we strap it to our backs as we walk about. We sell ourselves back into its service like some kind of mercenary. And we sell ourselves cheap: for just a moment of destructive pleasure and self-gratification.

In verse 18, Paul declares that there is nothing good in the unspiritual desires of his flesh (because acting on these desires separates him from God). He knows and understands that these fleshly desires do not characterize or define him. “It is not me doing these things, but sin living in me” (v 17). And yet Paul also knows and understands that in his “inner being” he delights in the Law of God (v 22). This tears him apart, as if someone else was sinning, using his own body to violate everything he holds dear. He is not doing what he wants to do, and he does what he doesn’t want to do. He has been “sold as a slave to sin” (v 14). Forlorn at his predicament, he pleads for release from this struggle, from this constantly thwarted and fruitless effort to overcome his flesh. In desperation he cries out, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? *Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (v 25). Through Christ we *can* be delivered from this struggle! But to what extent? You see, there are two extremes that we can be pulled toward in this debate over the extent of our freedom in Christ.

On the one end of the spectrum, we can be convinced that sinless perfection is a very real possibility in this life – that our freedom is absolute and perfect. In his first Epistle, John puts that misconception to rest: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10

But on the other end of the spectrum, we can be convinced to give up the struggle altogether. We accept the fact that we’re sinners, that we’ll always be sinners, and so why even try to be obedient? We take solace in the fact that Christ has paid for *all* of our sins, and we therefore continue with our sinful habits as if nothing happened at our conversion, as if the Spirit of God who lives in us has no power, and as if the Bible’s promise of freedom is only figurative, or a dream – and an impossible dream at that.

Neither of these extremes is true. Both of them make God out to be a liar. What then did happen at our conversion? What then is this very real Christian struggle all about? Is it about willpower? Is it about increasing our knowledge without applying it to how we live? Is it about passively letting go without any effort or striving on our part? NO! It is none of these things! But we cannot and must not try to do it on our own. This is a cooperative effort in which we choose to take the path laid out for us by God, and *then* the Spirit empowers us to make the journey. We walk intentionally and yet dependently – and there is no inconsistency between these two things. This is not a word-game. There is a very practical outworking of the Spirit's power in us. Through the remainder of Romans, Paul is going to explain this outworking, this tension – this seeming paradox. It is both profound and simple. And therefore it isn't easy.

Sin, Paul says, employs the Law, which is holy, righteous, and good (v 12), to condemn us – to impose a burden of guilt on us that is more than we can bear. It crushes us under its weight. By ourselves, we cannot carry this weight of the law, nor the condemnation it imposes on us. We cannot walk with it. And so we stumble and fall. We wind up using the law, just as sin does, to condemn ourselves. Paul cries out in desperation at his inability to overcome his flesh in order to meet the requirements of the law. This sets the stage for the cry of liberation found in Rom 8:1 that there is *no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!* Why not? What happened between chapters 7 and 8? Did the law disappear? Did the struggle end?

To what end do we struggle? Here is an answer from Colossians 3:1-10,

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. NIV

In other words, our cell door has been thrown wide open. We need to walk away from it, and not look back. Serving sin, when we do it, is now a voluntary activity. *We don't have to do it.* That seems to fit with what Paul is saying in Romans. But what's with his comment in chapter 7 that “in his inner being” he delights in the law of God. Do condemned people, sinners, non-believers ever delight in the law of God? Isn't that impossible for them? Yes, it is. And yet they have God's law written on their hearts – they have no excuse (Rom 1:20; 2:15). It's why non-believers may feel guilty when they sin. But they definitely do not “delight” in God's law. So Paul cannot be describing his former life apart from Christ in chapter 7. It is his present life *in* Christ that he speaks of.

Now let's ask the question again. What is it that must change? How is it possible to be freed from this ongoing, frustrating, and ineffectual struggle that we know and experience as Christians? How do we stop being voluntary servants of sin and the unspiritual desires of the flesh? What is the key to the “victorious life”? At what point is our freedom to be realized?

Ah. That explanation begins in chapter 8. And because understanding how the Spirit works in us is the key to enjoying a fruitful Christian walk, we're going to spend a lot of time on it.

Chapter 8 – Part 1

“*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” God isn’t mad at us. He’s not disappointed in us. In fact, he *likes* us. *We’re his children.* We’re not business partners with God. It’s not as if God sent Christ to live and die on our behalf, and we close the deal by bringing our faith to the table. Paul tells us that through Christ the law of the Spirit of Life freed us from the Law of Sin and Death. We did not free ourselves. *God* freed us. There are no more fruitless struggles between the mind and the flesh, between God’s Law and our desires. We have been finally and permanently freed from the condemnation of the law. We no longer live in bondage to our fear of death and punishment under the Law. However, this doesn’t mean that we are licentiousness or lawless. Rather, we have come under the rule of the law of the Spirit of Life. How do we submit to this law of the Spirit?

There are two things on which we our minds may be set: what the flesh desires, or what the Spirit desires. Notice the change from chapter 7 where we pitted our minds against the flesh. Here, the *Spirit* is pitted against the flesh, and the mind simply accepts the rule of the Spirit as its new nature. The mind assents to the control of the Spirit by focusing on what the Spirit desires. This produces life and peace. By contrast, the sinful mind (focused on the desires of the flesh) is hostile to God. It *cannot* submit to God’s law. Those who are controlled by the flesh rather than the Spirit *cannot* please God.

Here we find the core of our Christian walk. In verse 9, Paul explains that we don’t make a choice between the rule of the flesh and the rule of the Spirit. He makes a matter-of-fact statement that we *are* controlled by the Spirit, if Christ is in us, if the Spirit is living in us (vv 10-11). It’s who we are. It’s our identity. As followers of Jesus Christ, as those who believe in his name, it’s in our nature to be controlled by the Spirit. If that weren’t true, we’d still be in chapter 7 struggling to choose between what we know is right and what we feel compelled to do. We’d still be in bondage, trying to exercise self-restraint and feeling guilty every time we chose the flesh over the Spirit. That’s exactly what we’ve been freed from through Jesus Christ, thanks be to God (Rom 7:25).

What then separates us from those who are controlled by the flesh? It is the Spirit himself who separates us from them. He is the one who calls us, justifies us, and makes us holy. He is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, the one who raised Christ from the dead and who has raised us with Christ. He lives in us!¹⁷ Christ lives in us!¹⁸ *God* lives in us!¹⁹ If we don’t have the Spirit of Christ, we do not belong to Christ. This is where the room goes silent, because there is always this nagging suspicion that we do not belong to Christ, that we do not have the Spirit of Christ. What proof is there? What evidence do we actually have of his presence in us? The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (v16).²⁰ It is by the Spirit that we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

Yet we aren’t left there. We have an obligation (v12). “If by the Spirit *you* put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live,” Rom 8:13. “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us,” 1 John 3:24. Our obedience is the evidence of our faith, just as James declared: “Faith without works is dead.” How then are we any better off than we were under the law?? What advantage is there to being in Christ and having his Spirit? *Listen closely.* We are not alone in our struggle any longer. The one with the power to raise Jesus Christ from the dead lives in us, and he puts that power at our disposal, if we will only humble ourselves under his mighty hand (Jms 4:10; 1Pet 5:6). We must set our mind on the things of the Spirit. *What are these things?*

¹⁷ Jn 14:17; Rom 8:11; 9:5; 1Cor 3:16; 2Tim 1:14

¹⁸ Gal 2:20; 1Jn 3:24

¹⁹ Eph 2:22; 1Jn 4:12

²⁰ 1Cor 12:3; Mat 16:16-17;

When we submit to him, we live "according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). Our spirit lives because of righteousness (Rom 8:10), but it is a righteousness that belongs to Christ (10:3); and it comes to us by faith (9:30). With such faith, God's Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are his children (Rom 8:13-16). Yes, there are works that have been prepared for us ahead of time (Eph 2:10), but they are done by faith, not by willpower or out of fear. We have been given everything we need to lead a life of godliness (2Pet 1:3). We need to believe that, *and act on it*. We are not after personal perfection but dependent obedience. Even so, we live in a fallen world. We suffer here. We may be persecuted here. Yet we find joy here.

This connection between suffering and joy is described in Habakkuk 3:17-18. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior." We don't base our faith on what we see, or what we feel, but on the truth of God, on what we know about him from his word. "We live by faith and not by sight" (2Cor 5:7). That's *impossible* to do by ourselves. We must *allow* God to speak to us and work in us, yielded and still as the hymnist puts it (*Have Thine Own Way*). God won't strong-arm us. We freely submit to him because of what we know about him, and about our relationship to him.

There is immense joy and peace in being God's children. It is living out a song of celebration, a vivid expression of the exhilaration of being in the presence of God-in-heaven. Some of us think that such an experience of God has to wait until we're dead, but we don't. *That's the key*. Submission to the Spirit (i.e. living according to the Spirit) is not accomplished in the mind or the will. That's the whole of chapter 7. Nor is the life of the Spirit found solely in our emotions. It isn't in the tears of our suffering, or even in the laughter of our joy, as necessary as these are to conform us to the image of Christ.

The life of the Spirit is found in the Spirit himself. He is the one who comforts us in our suffering, and who celebrates with us in our joy. And as he does, we willingly receive his ministrations. *We submit to the Spirit through and by the Spirit*. That's not circular reasoning. We are told that Christ is the author and finisher of our salvation (Heb 12:2). Setting our mind on the things of the Spirit is not something we do, but something we believe. How are we freed of the struggle? "Thanks be to God: through Jesus Christ." Submission to the Spirit may be found only in our *celebration* of God through Jesus Christ. Authentic celebration of God for who he is and what he has done can come to us only by the Spirit who informs us of God's love. He is the one who illumines our understanding of God's word and who celebrates the glory of Christ in us and through us. When we catch sight of the Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God, our spirit soars with God's Spirit in an act of sheer celebration, just as we find in Revelation 22. "Behold! I am coming soon... The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

If we focus on obedience instead of Christ, we tend to act in our own strength. We move toward spiritual pride and criticism. We must focus on Christ. He is the sole object of our faith. It is our absolute dependence on Christ that enables our obedience and exposes the truth of Christ to the world. ***Celebration of Christ and of God's grace is how we submit to the Spirit of Christ.*** Jesus Christ lives in us actually, really, and effectively, if we believe and celebrate the fact of it. When we celebrate, we are never alone, no matter where we are, for the Spirit celebrates with us. That's the profound truth of Christianity. It is the "secret" of Christian living. It's not in the striving but in the being. It's not the effort but the realization of who we are to him. We don't grudgingly love one another, because God doesn't grudgingly love us. We are co-heirs of the kingdom (Rom 8:17), recipients of an abundant life (Jn 10:10). Everything that belongs to Christ belongs to us as well. Be thankful, and praise God. We cannot sin and celebrate Christ at the same time. *Therefore, setting our mind on the things of the Spirit means setting our mind on Christ.*

Chapter 8 – Part 2

In Romans 8:19-30, Paul describes the pangs of childbirth, the groaning that goes along with it, and the great joy that results from it. He describes not only the birthing of a new creation in us, but the groaning of the creation as it awaits its own rebirth. This is the great promise of the coming of the New Jerusalem. We're not destined to strum our lyres for eternity on some floating cloud with nothing to do. The earth will be reborn in its original perfection, and we will serve and know God directly and eternally in his Garden. Nothing in history or in the experiences of the Church will have been wasted. Our knowledge of every failure of will, every collapse of moral integrity, every victory over darkness, and every joyful moment of God's intervention, will be brought to bear as we celebrate God in his presence forever and ever. It will be just as Revelation describes it.

When I woke up this morning, KTLF was playing a praise song, "I am a flower quickly fading... It isn't who I am, but what You have done. It isn't what I've done, but who You are." That encapsulates much of what we've been discussing in the ministry of God's Spirit in us as he births us into the image of Christ. It's hard work. It's often painful. But we don't focus on the pain, or on ourselves. We're not observing ourselves in a mirror to take solace in the sweat and tears that are produced in the process. We're focused on the face of God himself, on his great pleasure in us, and on what will be produced in the end -- the Spirit is given to us as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come (2Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:4). That's his job, not ours. But we cooperate in the process by not grieving or quenching the Spirit. What we hope for, though we don't yet have it, we await patiently (8:25). We can do that because it is God himself who will bring it to fruition in us. We know our Redeemer, and we can trust Him to guard his work in us until That Day (1Tim 1:12).

Paul then asks a question in 8:31: "What, then, shall we say in response to this?" The word "this" is pregnant with meaning, but it boils down to our relationship to God. We are his *children*: foreknown, chosen, called, and justified. We have been birthed into the kingdom by God's Spirit who lives in us. The trials we are called to endure, the temptations we find ourselves under, and the opposition we encounter on the way, will not defeat us (1Cor 10:13). We are not servants of unrighteousness who are controlled by the flesh; rather, we are servants of righteousness who are led by the Spirit. How do we respond to such facts? Paul responds this way: ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

In other words, we have been chosen by God himself to be conformed to the image of his son. Nothing will change that. *Nothing*. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. God is sovereign not only in our election, but in our perseverance, and in our continuing relationship as his dearly loved children. He will not disown us because we carry his name. It would be like disowning himself. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful -- for he cannot deny himself." 2Ti 2:13 Denying himself means denying his eternal decree that we should be saved. It refers to his covenant with Abraham, and to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He purchased and purifies a people for himself (Rev 5:9; Lk 1:17; Tit 2:14; 1Pet 2:9-10).

Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." Jn 10:27-29 -- THAT is eternal security.

Therefore, Paul asks, who will bring charges against us? And even if accusations are made against us, we have a defender who is also our Judge and our Redeemer. "There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." If the Father did not withhold his own son, but gave him up for us all, then how will he withhold anything else from us? How will he not give us love, joy, peace, contentment, and eternal

fellowship with our Creator? (1Jn 1:3) It cannot be. "God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Num 23:19 God promised to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and to give them the promised land. He did that. And we have both these things in Christ. He has delivered us from bondage, and given us the kingdom. What God has ordained, man cannot set aside -- nor will God. We are heirs and co-heirs with Christ. ***There is no need to fear any longer!*** Christ even now, at this very moment, is interceding for us in heaven, calling out each of our names as he does so. We don't need to demand our rights. We don't need to fear rejection, loneliness, or failure. We don't need to force a resolution to our challenges. *God loves us*, and ***he will provide for us***. He is with us always (Heb 13:5-6).

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, for I have overcome the world." Jn 16:33 Paul expands on this and he reminds us that we are not just conquerors of the flesh and overcomers of the world. We are *more than conquerors* in all this. We are being made not just to survive, but to *prosper!* "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jer 29:11 But do not consider prosperity as the world considers it. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1Jn 2:15 Instead, we love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we love our neighbor just as we would love ourselves. Mk 12:30 Why? Because God loves us completely too. ***We are cherished by him*** (Ps 17:14).

Are we convinced of all this? Are we convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ? Not naturally. Our prayer should be that we are willing to be convinced of it. And that convincing is the work of the Spirit. "You know the Spirit, for he lives in you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (see Jn 14:15-27) Only the Holy Spirit can help us understand and accept these things as a living reality. We are completely dependent on him to reveal these things to us, and to remind us of God's love, and of his truth. May we be willing to listen, and to believe.

Chapter 9 – Part 1

Paul mentioned the elect in 8:33. He declared them justified by God and therefore not subject to accusation by anyone else. The focus of Chapter 9 is therefore to define election. Paul tells us the elect are the children of Abraham – not his physical or natural children – but his spiritual children. “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (9:6). Those who are **God’s children** are the objects of his promise to Abraham – the beneficiaries of God’s Covenant of Grace established with Abraham. And the beneficiaries are those whom God has named in the Covenant, and no others.

“Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (9:11-13) The elect are the ones whom the Father chose out of the world, the ones Christ died for and redeemed so that they would receive the benefits of the Covenant, and a right to an inheritance as heirs of the kingdom (8:17). Jacob and Esau were not sons of Abraham by two different mothers, but the same mother, sharing her womb at the very same time – and yet one is chosen and the other rejected without regard to their merit or works. Jacob received the promise because God unilaterally called him (v12).

OK. But what about the non-elect? Why does God’s wrath reign down on them? Isn’t it unjust to punish someone for something they apparently have no control over which is their sin-nature? From man’s standpoint of being a free agent, it’s unfair that God should have mercy on some and harden others (v18). It negates man’s will in the matter. But from God’s standpoint, it’s perfectly fair and reasonable: he is God. He did not force Adam to sin. Adam chose to sin, and by sinning he brought death into the world and allowed sin to reign (5:14; 1Cor 15:22). As heirs to Adam’s estate, we inherited the penalty of his transgression. It is rightly ours.

God is not the author of our sin nor did he unjustly place anyone under its penalty of death. Quite the contrary. God is indeed the author of grace, and he chose some to receive it through Christ that they might not inherit Adam’s penalty of death, but Christ’s gift of eternal life. Why did he not redeem everyone? Ah, there’s the rub. There’s the complaint of men. We want equality of outcome and not just equality of opportunity. We want everyone to receive the opportunity and the gift, or else no one may receive them. What that desire actually translates to is the sin that caused Adam to eat the fruit, and Cain to kill his brother, and Moses to slay two men: a rejection of the sovereignty of God.

Election and sovereignty are inseparably linked. God cannot be sovereign in some things and impotent in others. In his election of his own children, he is absolutely sovereign. He chose from the beginning, before the foundations of the earth, who would belong to him and who would not. And that just rankles some men. He gave them into the hands of his Son for redemption on the cross, and no others. And that just rankles some men. He calls them to himself, and no others. And that just rankles some men.

But it doesn’t rankle the elect. Nor does it give them satisfaction. It doesn’t puff them up with pride and arrogance. Rather, it drives them to their knees in utter disbelief and humility. It breaks their hearts to think that there are some who will never come to Christ because they cannot hear the call. It motivates them to sound the Gospel call at every opportunity, on every street-corner, and in every nation, so that some might hear and come out from the world and into the kingdom. They pray and they plead in hopes that, like Lot being saved for Abraham’s sake, some might be saved for their sake. If God was not indeed sovereign in the matter, then why should the elect pray at all? But he is sovereign. *He is*. Absolutely. By contrast, an Arminian would say either that we become elect by declaring our faith in Christ, or that God elects us because he foreknows who will make that declaration. Read fairly, chapter 9 refutes such a characterization of God’s election of his people. “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Jn. 15:16.

Chapter 9 – Part 2

Paul uses the Potter and his clay as a way to describe the authority and sovereignty of God in the matter of our election. The usual objection to election is that it is unfair to the non-elect. Paul gives several alternative ways of looking at it:

1. Those who object to election are in fact talking back to God as if to judge him
2. God has the right to do with his creation and with his creatures as he sees fit
3. God bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction
4. Through election, God makes the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy

When Job challenged God's justice, he was asked by God what authority he had to challenge it. Did he lay the foundations of the earth, or create the vast array of life? Did he help God to design or conceive it all? Is he co-equal with God? Here we find the accusation laid against Adam who challenged God's authority to prohibit eating from the Tree of Knowledge. It is rebellion. It is a complete rejection of the first commandment that we shall have no other gods before the One True God, not even ourselves.

And of course, what we miss is that God has declared mercy for some who have not earned it, nor deserve it, nor merit it in any way. More than that, God has offered up his own Son in atonement for their sin. This isn't a waiver of the penalty, but a substitutionary payment that need not have been made. It isn't the fact that some go to hell that is incomprehensible, but that any should go to heaven. The redemption of all the elect has been predetermined, "in advance", from the very foundation of the world.

We spite ourselves by refusing his gift simply because we believe that we can better determine what God should do with what was created by him, and thus rightfully belongs to him, and obviously may be used by him for whatever purpose he determines, according to his own will. He determines which of us he will call his child, and which will not be called his child (vv 25-26). The only thing that makes Israel the people of God, his chosen ones, is that they are indeed chosen – by God. And that same sovereign will which called Abraham and Isaac and Jacob now calls the Gentiles. God's election of his people is all that separates them from those who are lost, the wheat which will be gathered into his storehouse from the chaff that will be burned.

Moreover, the error that the non-elect of Israel make, contradicting God's calling in v 32, is that they pursued a righteousness of their own, as if they could save themselves by good works and not faith in God's grace. In other words, they believed that could elect themselves or bind God by their works so that they would somehow qualify for his grace. This grace, embodied in Christ, is a stumbling stone to us if we believe that we merit grace by declaring our faith or substituting our own works for the works of Christ. We are not saved by faith, or works, or doctrine, but by God's grace alone. Faith is merely the instrument he has given us by which we receive his gracious gift of reconciliation through Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8,9).

Chapter 10 – Parts 1 and 2

In chapter 10 we saw there are two primary conditions that are spoken of in regard to our calling. The first is that we are called *in* solitude, and the second is that we are called *into* fellowship. Indeed, we are called in solitude for the very purpose of fulfilling our calling in fellowship -- fellowship with God, and fellowship with other believers -- the Church. We are not called into isolation. We had three testimonies last Monday that God came to us in solitude to reveal himself. One person was on a destructive path, one had been ripped from an existing relationship, and the other found only emptiness in all that the world offers. But each had been "pulled aside" by God to solitude, to a vantage point from which to re-examine his or her life in new ways, and especially with regard to God. He is our primary relationship from which all other relationships flow. Solitude continues to be an essential component of our life in Christ, the place where we meet with him and are refreshed so that we may sojourn in the world as his representatives.

And that's the thrust of chapter 10:

1. that the Gospel is self-testifying and does not depend on the messenger to be effective
2. that the Gospel is not effectual without the enabling of God who directly reveals himself to his own
3. that the Gospel is nonetheless entrusted to the Church for proclamation to the world

Being zealous or emotional is not enough to save us. Knowledge alone is not enough to save us. Hearing the Gospel alone does not save. Our faith must have a tangible object, and that object is Jesus Christ alone. We must believe and confess publicly that Jesus is Lord, and that he rose from the dead to redeem his own. Only God can enable us to make such a profession of faith (10:16-21). Paul quotes Isaiah who wrote, "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been *revealed*?" Revelation is the crux of the issue in the effectiveness of the Gospel. Our ability to turn a phrase, reason through argumentation, or be persuasive in some human way, will not save another person. Salvation comes from God's word by God's Spirit, not from our word by our power.

Our own righteousness cannot save us. It is Christ's righteousness alone that saves. Christ is God's provision for our salvation and we must receive him as such through faith (Eph 2:8-9). And because the grace from which our faith arises is God's grace, God bestows it on his children equally. There are no cliques or special clubs in the kingdom of God. We are all servants of one another. There is no basis for arrogance or pride, no cause for being judgmental or condemning toward other believers, and more importantly, toward non-believers. That's because the only essential difference between a believer and a non-believer is that God has called us to himself, by grace. God's election of believers is completely sovereign -- and yet we are completely responsible for our sin. How that can be true or even possible is one of the great mysteries of God. And yet that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

And so we have been called to universally proclaim the Gospel and to disciple the elect of every nation. We bring to all men and all women of every kindred and tribe, of all ages, in every age, the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, and him crucified for our sakes. And "our feet are beautiful" as we bring the good news of freedom to the captives, and of life everlasting. We are the means which God has ordained to "hold out his hands" to a disobedient and obstinate people (v 10:21). Disobedient means those who continue to willfully withhold their belief. Obstinate means those who speak against God, contradict his truth, and set themselves up in opposition to him. And yet we once were among them. It is only by God's grace that our rebellion ended and we entered into peace and rest.

There are any number of reasons why the Gospel that we carry is rejected by many: it has not been revealed to them; they are not ready to receive it today; they do not understand what they hear; or perhaps they do not grasp their great need for Christ. And so, as we present the Gospel, we are not embarrassed or frustrated when it is rejected. They don't reject us, but God. We are patient and kind because this still may

be a brother or sister in the faith, but not today, or not by us. We are clear in what we preach, so that there will be no misunderstandings. And we are passionate and sincere so that they may grasp the very real danger to their soul of being without the covering of Christ come Judgment Day.

Does this mean in any way that the burden is on us personally to ensure the Gospel goes out effectively? No. God redeems his people, and yet God has ordained the means of their redemption through the Gospel proclaimed by the Church. There are individual believers who cannot proclaim the gospel. They may lie in a coma in a hospital, or for some other reason are physically incapable of presenting it. And yet we are all part of the Body of Christ. We all contribute to the edification of the saints and the proclamation of the Gospel. We are all facilitators even if we are not all presenters. Nonetheless, we each have a testimony which we are obligated to share that others might come to understand the great love of God. May his name be praised in all we say and do.

Chapter 11 – Parts 1 - 3*Key Words and Phrases –*

- Foreknow – to know beforehand; to have knowledge ahead of time; to know before some event or circumstance arises.
- Reserved – left behind or leave remaining; same root as “remnant;” clearly indicates that the action of reserving is by God, not by the remnant.
- Harden – to become callused (passive tense), or dull of understanding
- Stupor – insensibility caused by piercing pain, grief, or remorse (deadened by shock, dismay, or loss)
- Boast over (v18) – to be arrogant towards
- Unbelief (v20) – without faith, or faithlessness
- Continue in his kindness – lit. “abide in goodness.”
- Persist in unbelief – lit. “abide in faithlessness”
- Ignorant – without knowledge
- Conceited – wise in yourself
- Hardening – blindness or lack of revelation
- Bound – to enclose or lock up, as in a closet or jail

Chapter 11 summarizes the doctrine of election that Paul has been driving home throughout Romans. The key word that may cause confusion here is “foreknew” (verse 2). In Romans 8:29 we were told, “Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son.” There are two ways to understand such foreknowledge. I could say, “I knew Jack before he became a doctor.” I could also say, “I knew Jack would become a doctor.” Both are a type of foreknowledge, but the second is actually *foreseeing* rather than foreknowing. Did God *foresee* who would become his among the Israelites and then choose them, or did he *foreknow* those whom he chose among both Israelites and Gentiles? If God is not reacting to our choice, but is instead the initiator and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2), then what Jews and Gentiles have in common is God’s election of them both. Hence, they are one in Christ, as Paul is trying to point out to both groups at Rome.

A little historical background might help here. God-fearing gentiles worshipped with the Jews long before the New Testament. In fact, the temple at Jerusalem had an outer court built especially for the Gentiles, indicating the hope that one day the whole world would worship the God of Israel. This court derived its name from the fact that Gentiles were permitted into this area provided they conducted themselves in a reverent manner. However, a distinction was made between Jews and Gentiles as far as access goes. Gentiles were forbidden from the inner temple areas. Even Roman citizenship did not protect a Gentile who intruded into those prohibited areas. So although this very ornate court was made for God-fearing Gentiles, Jews still regarded them as inferior, and brought this condescension into the Church.

Paul has been explaining the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, and the fact that we are all co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17; Gal 3:29). There is no longer an inner and outer court in the kingdom of God. There is no longer restricted or privileged access to the throne of grace. Those who follow Christ by faith are equal in status and grace whether Jew or Gentile. God *foreknows* every one of his children, whether Jew or Gentile. He wrote each of their names in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). The names of the non-elect, by contrast, were not written in the Book of Life (Rev 13:8, 17:8). They were not given to Christ for redemption (Jn 6:39; 7:9). God chose his people out of the world to be placed under his Covenant of Grace as its beneficiaries.

And so Paul has told us that not all of the nation of Israel are the elect of Israel (Rom 9:6-7), but only those who by faith rely on God’s promise to Abraham (Rom 9:8). These are the ones who constitute

Abraham's seed and his offspring. These are the inheritors of the promise (Rom 4:13-20). Thus, there are those within the nation of Israel who are elect, and there are those who are not. In the same way, there are those among the nations who are elect, and there are those who are not. But all of the elect are God's remnant. He keeps them all from condemnation and destruction of the Law (Rom 5:8; 8:1). God will redeem and preserve every one of them. Not one will be lost (Jn 17:12). And so all Israel will be saved (11:26), whether Jew or Gentile. This is what I believe Paul means by his references to "all Israel" and to "the fullness of the Gentiles" (11:12, 25).

The question that now arises is how God selects his remnant. The answer is that they are "chosen by grace" (11:5). God has chosen by grace some who are not to bow their knee to Baal (11:4). God reserves them and keeps them by his sovereign grace. They do not earn his favor or merit his grace by not bowing their knee (9:11-13). Instead, *because* of his grace, they will not bow their knee. Moreover, they *cannot* earn his favor by not bowing their knee (8:8; 11:10). Otherwise it wouldn't be grace (4:4; 11:6). What is at stake in such a question is the extent of God's sovereignty, the effectiveness of Christ's atonement, and the power of the Holy Spirit. That's serious stuff. Does God limit his sovereignty by making his ability to save us conditional upon our free-will choice of Christ? Jesus says no: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). Is God dependent on us? Paul says no: "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (9:8). Is the Holy Spirit impotent to save and preserve us, or does he guarantee our inheritance? Paul tells us that God guarantees it. "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring" (4:16; 2Co 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14).

Paul is pointing out in Romans that salvation isn't something that we do, but something that is done to us. We can't claim credit for it. It isn't works but grace. It isn't merit but favor. In chapter 11, Paul moves on to the idea that it isn't membership in some group that saves us either (such as being born an Israelite or joining a Church). That's why Gentiles do not need to become Jews to be saved. Rather, God's grace is extended to the elect of every nation and tribe (Rev 7:9). The Church is comprised of the elect of every nation. It's why we shouldn't be presumptuous about our position and try to lord it over another believer (11:21). The clay belongs to the Potter to honor as he sees fit (9:21), and so we honor whom he honors.

Yet, if God keeps a remnant for himself and hardens the rest (11:5-8), that seems to suggest that God has chosen some for destruction by imposing their sinful nature on them and then condemning them for it (9:19). That's easy enough to conclude, logically at least, but it's a perennial heresy known as *double-predestination* or *hyper-Calvinism*. It is rejected by Arminians and Calvinists alike. Paul tells us in 1Co 15:22, "For as *in Adam* all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive." Sin and death were not randomly allocated by God. Death was the fixed consequence of Adam's sin, and it fell upon the whole of mankind. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned..." (Rom 5:12). Having no life in us, we could not give birth to life. We were all under the penalty of death. Apart from the grace of God and the reconciliation afforded through Christ's atoning sacrifice, we too would suffer eternal condemnation.

In other words, we are not condemned by God without cause. It is our own sin that condemns us, both the guilt imputed to us because of Adam, and the guilt earned by us through our own acts. Christ removes the guilt and penalty of sin for the elect. Jn 3:17-18, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." This verse is the cause of some confusion. The phrase "because he has not believed in the name of the Son of God" does not mean that such unbelief is what causes our condemnation. Rather it means that such unbelief keeps us from seeking relief through Christ. Why doesn't everyone seek relief? Because not all are elect. The non-elect cannot see, hear, or understand the remedy – they cannot accept it

even when it is offered to them (Jn 10:26). They are dead in their trespasses and sins, unable to respond apart from the regeneration of the Spirit (Jn 3:3). They are hardened.

And yet, hardening alone does not prevent the application of Christ's atoning blood. They are not lost because they are hardened. They are lost because they are sinners. The Greek word for harden refers to calluses. Our soul becomes callused by sin. Over time we acquire a wanton indifference to our wrongdoing that is brought on by repeated sin. It happens to all of us, elect and non-elect alike: "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The Bible calls it the "deceitfulness of sin." Heb 3:13: We harden because in God's design, sin begets sin and it becomes habitual. That doesn't make God the author of sin. He doesn't force us to sin or put us on the greased slide to hell. We do that to ourselves. But in his grace, God pulls some of us off the slide. He elects some of us to eternal life instead of eternal destruction. He does it of his own free will and according to his own counsel. He doesn't ask for our input or condition it on our actions (Job 35:1-8). He doesn't look at our merit (Eph 2:8-9). And he certainly doesn't choose us according to our own will or desire (Rom 9:16). His mercy alone brings us relief from our debt of sin. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." 1Pe 1:3.

All of that being true, we must still willingly confess our faith in Christ. It is not forced upon us. We are *enabled* to see the kingdom and hear the truth, but we are not *compelled* to confess Christ. We freely come to him as God draws us to him (Jn 6:37, 44). Such enabling comes to all the elect, whether today, tomorrow, or in the years to come. Some who are our enemies today will be fellow believers tomorrow (Rom 11:28). That's one reason to love our enemies (Mt 5:44-48). Why? Because we too were once the enemies of God (Rom 5:10). We were by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3):

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands — remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. Eph 2:4-16 ESV

With all this in mind, Israel is not to be discounted. God has forgotten none of those whom he foreknew. They are the Gospel root from which the Gentile branches grow. Israel still contains more elect who must be harvested from their crop. Their stumbling has caused the Gospel to be extended to the Gentiles. And the salvation of the Gentiles will cause even more elect to be found among Israel as they become envious. In this way, all the elect will be drawn to Christ, and so "all Israel" will be saved. When the remnant of Israel comes (v15) it will be like the dead coming to life. The first-fruit (first-born among many brothers)

is Christ (8:29), who makes the rest of the elect holy as well. Therefore we are to watch our ways and guard our faith that we might evidence our root – for if God did not spare the original branches for unbelief, he won't spare those who have been grafted in either.

Applications –

We might apply the word “outsiders” to those outside our personal clique, outside our non-essential distinctives, outside our church or denomination, or outside Christianity altogether. In every case, we draw lines to condemn, criticize, and judge others, and thus we corrupt the Lord's Table (Mt 25:4-45; Lk 14:16-24). We offer gall in place of forgiveness, trying to increase the other's suffering. We silence the gospel by denying them the same love, grace, and mercy of God that was extended to us. Whenever we speak, to whomever we speak, we need to speak mercy and forgiveness because we are Christ to the world, and that's what he spoke to us.

We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). When we become “superior” in our own minds, we also become complacent and self-justified. Those same lines that we use to condemn, criticize, and judge another are often marks of pride, not humility. We must defend the faith against misconceptions and lies, but we must never engage in personal attacks. Personal attacks are an unloving way to elevate ourselves at someone else's expense – they are never a way to elevate the truth. We are merely comparing ourselves to one another; which the Bible condemns (2Co 10:12).

Our salvation is not secured because we “work it out with fear and trembling,” but because God works it out in us through his Spirit. It is preserved by God, not us. His sovereign election is a reflection of his will for us, and his will for us is that we be redeemed and presented to him holy and just (Col 1:22; Jude 1:24). And what God wills, he accomplishes – for his word never returns to him without accomplishing its purposes (Isa 55:11). The doctrine of election, necessitated by our fallen state, is the primary reason why we must be united in Christ. There is one Gospel, one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one Lord, one God and Father of all (2Cor 11:4; Eph 4:4). We have no advantages over one another, only our debt to one another, which is the debt of love (Rom 13:8).

Chapter 12 – Parts 1 and 2

Key Words and Phrases –

- Urge – to summon or call upon
- Spiritual Worship – reasonable or reasoned (*logikos*) service.
- Test – to assay for genuineness
- Approve – to prove or certify
- Think more highly – to consider beside or beyond what is prudent
- In accordance... – consider that God has meted out faith to each of us as he wills

It isn't easy to consider what we have to offer in the way of "reasoned service" but it seems clear that we ought to acknowledge God in all we do (glorify him), in all we have (thank him), and in all that we encounter in our lives, good and bad (submit to him). And yet we often fall into the trap of materialism, conforming ourselves to the world's desires and ways, striving after what the world admires like having lots of money, widespread fame, luxurious housing, abundant clothing, and the latest technology, as long as it's bigger and better than what someone else has. We succumb to competing with one another.

As commonly and regularly experienced as these things are, those instances of being transformed into the image of Christ seem so rare. We don't see or recognize them as a daily progression toward that image. It may be that progress is being made, but it's so incremental that we don't notice it. What we notice is that our own sinfulness seems always to be with us. David lamented: "My sin is always before me." Ps 51:3. Indeed, the older and wiser a Christian becomes, the more aware he is of his personal sin. And perhaps that's the progress we should see. It's a clear reminder of how absolutely necessary Christ's righteousness and his atonement are to our salvation. That's what keeps us humble and submitted, which are two marks of growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2Pet 3:18). That alone can be sufficient to think neither too highly nor too lowly of ourselves. We are all equally in Christ's debt.

As God has allocated our functions or giftedness within the Body of Christ for the benefit of the Body of Christ, we have to realize that no single one of us is self-sufficient. We all need one another if the Body is to work effectively towards the Great Commission. If one has the gift of giving, someone else must be in want. If someone has the gift of teaching, someone else must learn. If one has the gift of mercy, someone else must be in need of mercy. If one has the gift of exhortation, someone must need correction. What we tend to lack is the humility to seek help, assistance, guidance, and correction, or the humility to offer it gracefully, knowing that we are just as needy. God has distributed these gifts to specifically ensure that we love one another, and so that we learn to depend on his provision for us through the Body of Christ. It also ensures that we are motivated to exercise our gifts, for God's glory *and* for our benefit. Whatever we do, we do it as for the Lord (Col 3:17, 23-24; Prov 3:6; 1Jn 3:18). And so we should enjoy today, and be watching for every opportunity God provides for us to serve.

There seems to be a clear relationship between our sacrifice (our reasonable service to God), and God's provision for his people. We exercise our giftedness in recognition that our worship of God and our membership in the Body are intertwined. We cannot separate them. We have been called into fellowship with one another and with God as a package deal (1Jn 1:3). It was Christ's prayer for us that we be one, having God the Trinity in us, and that we abide in him (Jn 17:20-24; Jn 15:4). That's why we love: for he first loved us (1Jn 4:19). "A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (Jn 13:34; 15:12) Paul clarifies this commandment by telling us that love must be sincere (Rom 12:9). But what does that mean? Do we have to "feel" it to be sincere, or is the action enough? What does motive have to do with it? Can we do the right thing for the wrong reason and still sincerely love? Is it more about *wanting* to do it than being *obligated* to do it? And what about our reason for wanting to do it? Does that matter? We might say that sincere love means doing something for

someone else because we either want to do it for them, or because we want to do it for Christ's sake. It is entirely possible (and I believe entirely necessary) to recognize Christ's love for his people, and to lovingly serve them without ever considering our own emotions towards them. In fact, we can love and serve others who oppose Christ without having to like them at all. How else could we love our enemies? (Mat 5:43-45; Rom 12:20) Agape love has nothing to do with having an emotional bond with someone. It is doing what is right and beneficial toward them *without* regard to our own feelings about it. It remains unfeigned even when we do that. We might hope that feigned love can lead to sincere love in time, simply because we are practicing the act of loving someone. In other words, feelings will follow our actions. That's why we don't want to wait on the feelings before we act, or we may never act.

Balance in the Christian Walk: we can be devoted to one another, but it doesn't mean we do it above our devotion to God and family, nor does it mean that we ignore sin; we can honor one another, but it doesn't mean that we idolize someone or show favoritism; we can share with needy people, but we don't enable them to continue in sin – i.e. we don't create a co-dependent relationship; we can practice hospitality, but we don't destroy the peace and safety of our homes or deny others the opportunity to be hospitable; we can bless those who persecute us, but we don't facilitate destructive behavior or put someone else in harm's way. We walk the narrow path, neither too far to the right or left (Isa 30:21).

Rom 12:16 is another verse that requires balance. It implies that pride is what makes us think too highly of ourselves (Rom 12:3). Pride defeats harmony; it produces cliquishness and strives for a personal following. Our petty conceits about ourselves and our sense of superiority make it impossible to serve one another in love and humility. On the other hand, thinking too lowly of ourselves enables others to be snared by pride. We are not to become a doormat; that's subservience, not submissiveness. Whether we think too highly or too lowly of ourselves, the problem is that we are comparing ourselves to each other. We must not do that. "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load." Gal 6:3-5 NIV

That same principle applies to dealing with evil. We don't return evil for evil. And we don't compare ourselves with those who practice evil. We once were like them (Eph 2:3). So when we hate evil, or when we pursue righteousness, we do it for its own sake and not as a matter of rendering judgment on someone else. Moreover, when we act together as the Body of Christ, we never use the sword or try to coerce others to do what is right – not even by force of law. All that does is stimulate fear, opposition, and resentment among non-believers. It also tempts us to resort to worldly means instead of turning to God. Rather, we treat everyone with kindness, being charitable in all we do. Thus we enhance the reputation of the Church, improve Gospel receptivity, and foster the welfare of the community in which we live.

Bottom line: If we are uniformly kind, loving, merciful, humble, and filled with grace towards all, it will build unity and fellowship in the Body, and it will produce good-will in the community towards the Body of Christ. Thus God's name will be great among the nations (Ps 46:10; Isa 61:9; Mal 1:11; con Rom 2:24).

Chapter 13 – Parts 1 and 2

As Americans, we're supposed to have a natural distrust of government. But we don't. As Christians, we're supposed to be wary of political solutions. But we aren't. In fact, the Church in America has become so enmeshed in politics over the past 30 years that Christianity and Republicanism are perceived by many as the same thing. Those in the Christian Right and the National Association of Evangelicals regularly volunteer to speak for the Church with regard to politics and social justice. But they can't.

Thus we come to chapter 13 which deals with the proper relationship between believers, *as individuals*, and the state – whatever form state authority may take, whether democratic or autocratic. We are told to submit to governing authorities, civil authorities, and other non-Church authorities who may or may not have our best interests at heart. We want to know whether there is any “wobble-room” in this mandate, whether we may stand up for justice and against such authorities. We want to be sure we don't participate in state crimes by failing to oppose what is evil. To do that, we need to examine God's intended role for civil government. Paul tells us that the government acts as God's servant, even when it is not run by his children. God's intent for civil authority is to do good to all those whom God places under its care. It acts as God's agent of wrath against wrong-doers, and to that end it carries the sword.

Therefore, when civil authority does evil to its people, or when it brings wrath and punishment on those who do right, it no longer acts under God's authority, even though it acts within God's sovereignty. Of course, God may cause an evil regime to arise as a test for his people, to see if we love justice and God's truth more than we love peace and tranquility. What if the United States, as an agent of God, had not opposed the Axis Powers? What if it failed to recognize the danger, or lacked the resolve to oppose it? Evil would have run amuck, bringing world-wide carnage. But America arose as one and defeated the Axis Powers. Resistance to evil seems clearly justified, not as revenge, but as upholding God's law.

We have two questions to ask in this regard. First, “Under what circumstances we may judge the civil authority, as an entity, to be opposed to the good of its people?” Second, “Who has the right to make such an assessment and to call God's people to arise against it?” How extensive must the evil be to justify widespread political or social revolt? Does any Christian who thinks that what the government is doing is wrong have the right to oppose it in the name of Christ? Who has the authority to draw the rest of the Church into what may be an unnecessary and unwarranted conflict? Who speaks for the Church in such matters? No one. And that's actually a good thing. The Church isn't intended to speak as an institution to the world. So we'll approach this passage in Romans from an individual standpoint, understanding that our actions will reflect on the Church as a whole.

When we meet our civic responsibilities as Christians, being obedient to the laws of our government (even its traffic laws), we achieve a number of beneficial things.

- We learn submission to the law and we uphold it (Rom 3:31)
- We receive the commendation of those in authority (Rom 13:3)
- We honor God who establishes all civil authority (Rom 13:4)
- We avoid punishment and the wrath of the authorities (Rom 13:4), and
- We keep a clear conscience before God and men (Ac 24:16)

Keeping a clear conscience means that we have learned to consciously distinguish right from wrong according to God's word. Thus we are able to act accordingly. Recognizing that God establishes authorities, we also recognize that not submitting to them is the same as not submitting to God. David wrote, “Against you only have I sinned” Ps 51:4. Yet this is not blind submission. We are also commanded to weigh our duty to men against our higher duty to God (Ac 5:29). This requires wisdom and discernment. As I pointed out earlier, there may be times when resistance is justified. But in the

normal course of life, our resistance more likely springs from our own pride and rebelliousness. We must consider the possibility that our desire to resist authority may be our desire to resist God’s sovereignty. When we do resist, we may express it by attacking the competence or merit of those in authority above us (gossip and back-biting). We exalt ourselves above them by appointing ourselves to be their judges.

In Rom 13:6, Paul reminds us that it’s easy to criticize another’s efforts when it’s not our full-time job, as it is for them. Paul suggests that, being indebted to the love of Christ, we owe everyone that same debt of love (Rom 13:7-8). God is the one who establishes the relationship between us and others, a relationship that may require us to submit to another. As a result, resistance means we are actually stealing from them. We owe them honor, respect, submission, and love, but instead we repay them with dishonor, disrespect, rebellion, and contempt. As we steal in this way, we heap guilt upon ourselves; our own conscience will condemn us. Worse still, we lose God’s commendation because we are disobeying his will.

Obedience to God’s will requires obedience to God’s law. The law was given to us for our good, not as a snare to condemn us. We should value the law. It was instituted to preserve peace and order so that we might live together in harmony and not strife. That’s why “one who loves another has fulfilled the law” Rom 13:8. Christ commands us, “Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13:34-35). “Love your enemies, do good, lend expecting nothing in return” (Lk 6:35) “Disciple the nations, *teaching them to obey all I have commanded you*” (Mt. 28:19-20). In obeying, we are led to consider Christ, to turn our eyes upon him, thankful that his righteousness has been accounted to us. We come to understand that our obedience is a means to honor Christ. The law reminds us to do no harm to our neighbor (Rom 13:10), and to treat one another with the same care we might show to a stranger (Lk 10:33-37). It is unfortunate, but sometimes we abuse the ties that bind us together in the Body. We take one another for granted and treat one another poorly. We think that forgiveness after-the-fact makes charity before-the-fact unnecessary. To love one another as Christ loved us is to take others into account in all we say and do, knowing that we will give an account for every word we speak (Lk 19:22).

What impact then does the return of Christ have on this debt of love to others and fidelity to authority? We all feel that it *should* motivate us, but most of us confess that in reality it *doesn’t*. It’s already been two thousand years and we’ve stopped watching for him. But we do think in terms of the mortality of our own life, that it may well end tonight and we will be called to give an account. We’re admonished not to be slothful (Rom 13:11). The slothful servant in the *Parable of the Talents* was severely rebuked (Mt 25:13-30). He knew that his master would return and ask him to give an account. Yet he failed to invest what was given to him, unwilling to take advantage of the offer made to him. As a result, his master called him *wicked* and threw him out where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He never submitted to authority, never learned obedience, never gained a conscience to distinguish right from wrong, and probably never cared. He was lost, dead in his trespasses and sins.

We, however, are not slothful servants; we are dutiful servants. We put away our sin today– not later. We know that the time is short. Therefore we *clothe* ourselves with Christ, not even thinking about how to gratify our sinful desires (Rom 13:14).²¹ The darkness of a world gone mad *will* come to an end. Those who oppose Christ and persecute his Church, those who hound his followers from house to house, dragging the inhabitants off to prison and to death, will themselves be dragged before the Judgment Seat of God. The light of a new dawn is upon us. Believing that, Paul implores us to be about God’s business while time remains, that Christ might find faith on the earth when he returns (Lk 18:18).

²¹ Gal 5:13-18 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. NIV

Romans Chapter 14 – Part 1

Key words and phrases:

- Whose faith is weak – lit. “being weak” suggests an ongoing condition; diseased, infirm, powerless.
- Passing judgment – disputing, arguing, making judgments
- Look down on – to despise, treat of no account or with contempt, ignore, shun, or not esteem.
- Lives or dies to himself – it’s all about me
- Lives or dies to the Lord – it’s all about him
- Give an account – chided to be circumspect in our behavior

The problem with judging someone in an area that doesn’t matter doctrinally is that it causes doubt, disunity, division, and devouring (Gal 5:15). We don’t accept that person (v1). We look down on him (v3). We wrongfully judge him or worse, we try to lord it over him (v4). We don’t allow him to be convinced in his own mind about it. Instead, we try to convince or persuade him to our way of thinking. But if we succeed, we haven’t helped him live to Christ, to his own master, but to us.

On the other hand, if it is an area that does matter, such as obedience, if we fail to correct a brother, then we let him fall into more and more sin, and we become co-conspirators. We have failed in our duty as watchmen and his blood is on us (Ezek 3:18-20; Act 20:26). Correcting a brother lovingly can cover a multitude of sins, *for him* (Jms 5:20; 1Pet 4:8).

The thought of the Judgment Seat, which believers will not escape, should make us circumspect in our own judgment of others:

Mt 7:2-5 – with the measure I judge others, I will be judged.

1Co 5:12 – I am not to judge those outside the Church – only those within

1Co 6:2,5 – I am not the judge of others, either to save or destroy them; that belongs to God alone

Jms 4:12 – The authority to judge comes from God – I must not appoint myself to be a judge

Rv 20:4 – I will be judged, and I long for it to be merciful being most aware of my own corruption. At the Judgment Seat I must explain my own actions to the One who knows me better than I know myself. How would I not be willing to offer mercy? How could I refuse to recognize and take into account the bondage from which I myself have been freed by God’s grace alone?

See also 1Cor 4:5 (judge nothing before the time); **2Cor 5:10** (we will all be judged according to what we have done); **Rev 20:12** (our works are recorded in the Book and they will be read aloud)

Part 2 – v.13-23

Key words and phrases:

- Make up your mind – “judge this instead”
- Distressed – grieved, sorrowed, uneasy or lacking in conviction or scruples
- Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil – an accusation against what we do in our freedom is not to be an accusation against our character; Satan is the accuser, not us.
- The kingdom is of righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Spirit
- Mutual edification – to build one another up by promoting Christian growth in wisdom, piety, graciousness, and holiness (sidenote: we need to stop blaming others for our own failings)
- Do not destroy the work of God – it is God who is at work in our brothers and sisters; they are the work of Christ’s death (14:15)
- Condemn himself by what he approves – either to violate our own conscience by doing something we are not convinced is right, or doing what we are convinced is right but causing another to stumble.
- Doubt... is not from faith – we must not be double-minded but fully persuaded (Eph 4:14)

What we do may be permissible, but it may not be beneficial (1Co 10:23). Nothing should master us, not even our own freedom. We are not to make an idol of anything – we must not permit the means by which we love God to become ends in themselves. We are not to make an idol of a particular kind of music in worship, nor are we to fabricate rules of right and wrong that are not products of our love for one another. We don't submit to the rules of the world any longer: do not do this or that (no dancing, imposing cultural dress codes, no makeup or jewelry, etc) Col 2:20-23.

It would be better to have a millstone tied around our neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause another believer to stumble (Mt 18:6). We are not to use our freedom to gratify the flesh, to exalt our ego, or to hide or justify our own depravity. Rather we are to use it or not use it in such a way as to serve others with love, and to serve God with humility.

And *therefore*, if we are to minister to other believers, and take into account the impact of our own views and actions on them, pursuing their best interests above our own, then we have to know them well enough to discern their needs and weaknesses. *Hint*. We need to be students not only of Christ, but of one another. We also need to respect one another's freedom or constraints, allowing each other to have them without imposing our own views on them. Otherwise we will either steal their freedom or abuse our own (by judging others in areas that don't matter).

Faith is not just *saving faith* that acknowledges what Christ has done, but it is also *living faith* that acknowledges what Christ is doing. It is our moral conviction of the truthfulness of God. It is that expression of my trust in Christ that results in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). It is working out my salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). It is my conviction that God's promises are true and lasting.

Application: Living by Faith – How? (overcoming the doubt in Rom 14:23)

Rom 1:17 The righteous shall live by faith – we are righteous and faithful, not unrighteous and faithless
2Cor 5:7 We walk by faith, not by sight – we trust God, not doubting him or suspecting his intentions
Gal 2:20 I no longer live, but Christ lives in me – we are to live for Christ, not for ourselves

Heb 10:36-39 You have need of endurance to do the will of God, ... We are not like those who shrink back and are destroyed, but we have faith and thereby we preserve our souls – we are to endure in doing God's will, being consistent and persistent, not lacking in confidence, but having the faith to *press on*, and to do so in the face of all opposition, doubt, and hardship.

Jms 1:6 He who doubts... is blown about by the wind, ... unstable in all he does – we are to be fully persuaded of what is right and good and acceptable. If we are in doubt about it, we not only waiver, but we are likely to fall. Here, the idea of developing a conscience through God's word, a conscious knowledge of what is right and wrong, is crucial to our walk and to our sanctification. But too often our conscience has been incorrectly developed by our parents or our peers; we need to correct our understanding of right and wrong so that it aligns with God's word and not with some other standard.

That process of spiritual growth is what we are committed to foster in every other believer, but not at the expense of love and mutual edification – and so we don't argue over non-essentials. It's not helpful.

Romans Chapter 15 – Part 1*Key words and phrases:*

- Strong – able, powerful, influential, strong in soul, bearing up in trials
- Weak – without ability, power, influence, or fortitude
- Ought – to owe a debt or be bound by duty
- Bear with – literally to bear or carry; to sustain or uphold
- Failings – weakness, feebleness, lacking strength or power (whether external or internal)
- Please – to accommodate someone
- Good – having a good constitution or nature; a gift; having a clear conscience that causes joy or happiness

Why should we bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves? As you can see from the definitions of strong and weak, this passage can refer to our social rank as well as our strength of character (or self-control). Paul commands the strong among us to carry the weak, to bear with them in their needs and infirmities. But why? Primarily it is that we should be like Christ who bore our infirmities. We learn to accept one another, and thereby we bring praise to God (v. 7). It is for our neighbor's good, to build him up and encourage him. Christ's zeal for his Father caused him to be rejected and insulted by others. Can we do less? This is how they treated the prophets of old (Mt 23:30+). Woe to those who are rich and self-sufficient (Lk 6:23-31). The prophets were commended for their faith, not their comfort (Heb 11:37-40 – sawed in half). Their example is our encouragement – God is the one who gives us endurance and encouragement so that we may follow Christ. In following him together, we are united in spirit so that we glorify God. And in our unity, following the examples of our Lord and of the prophets, we likewise impart endurance and encouragement to one another.

Why then do we hope? What has it got to do with bearing with the failings of the weak among us? In verses 4 and 5, the product of our endurance and of the encouragement of the Scriptures is hope. We put up with, or bear with, or support the infirm, the weak, and the doubtful among us, so that *together* we endure. And as a result of our mutual endurance, mutual support, and mutual encouragement, we all have *hope* in the provision of God for our continued endurance. We hope because Christ has confirmed the promises made to the patriarchs. By doing so, the Gentiles praise God for his mercy and put their hope in him (v12), alongside the Jews. Trust causes us to hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be filled with joy and peace (v13) – and that is despite our trials and the opposition we encounter for Christ.

In verse 14 we find an interesting twist when we do a word-study. It might be translated, “I myself am persuaded, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness [referring back to the ‘good’ in v.1], being filled with all knowledge and strong [again referring to v.1] to exhort one another.” Why is Paul persuaded and confident of this? Because the responsibility is on the Holy Spirit to ensure it happens. Our sanctification is the result of his work and his power, and not just our own. In v.17 Paul says, “Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.” He has discharged his duty to God to proclaim the gospel. They have been given all the knowledge they need to exhort one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), to be united in spirit, to be ministers of the gospel as he is, and to fulfill their own priestly duties. But none of this is possible apart from the Spirit of God who illumines and empowers us. And therefore our burden is light (Mt 11:29-30).

Paul reminds us indirectly that the proclamation of the Gospel is transformative by the power of the HS. It increases our trust, hope, and perseverance. Our sanctification makes us an offering acceptable to God. See 1Cor 11:2; Col 1:22; and Jude 1:24. This is the work of God in us, in response to the Gospel. How then will we bear up with the failings of the weak? Meditate on the “Love Chapter” – 1Cor 13.

Romans Chapter 15 – Part 2

Key words and phrases:

- It has always been my ambition – literally, “so in this way I am *striving*”
- Where Christ was not known – i.e. not where the name of Christ was called upon in faith
- In the service of the saints – or, “to serve the saints”
- Shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings – fellowshiped in the things of the Spirit
- Share with them their material blessings – to fellowship in the things of the flesh
- Blessing of Christ – some manuscripts: the blessing of the Gospel of Christ
- Join me in my struggle – strive together with me (in prayers to God for me)
- Be refreshed – this is not passive tense; “together with you refresh [one another]”

Paul tells them that his great desire is to see new believers in untouched regions rather than cover the same territory that others already have access to. Paul is a Roman citizen, and as such he may travel wherever he wishes. He speaks a number of languages (1Cor 14:18) and wants to put them to use. He doesn’t want anyone to be left out of the blessings of the Gospel, especially the gentiles. This is his special calling and his crown.

As such, Paul instructs the gentiles at Rome that they owe much to the Jews for preserving the Law and the Prophets for them, and through whom the Messiah has come. The Jews have probably lost everything for the sake of the gospel. The gentiles can repay them in part by supporting them materially, or by employing them. The Jews, however, are not superior, nor may they impose the law upon the gentiles. They are not to consider the gentiles somehow “2nd class” citizens of the kingdom just because their lifestyle radically differs from their own. Under the Law, Jews were not to associate with gentiles or enter their houses; they were considered “unclean”— and yet here they are together in the Church. The Jews may think that if the gentiles adopt the law, they will no longer be unclean. But Paul aims to end this distorted view of the law, and the false distinction that exists between them. We are one in Christ.

Paul encourages them to produce fruit in keeping with their shared faith: the donations which he carries to Jerusalem from the gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia are the fruit of their correct understanding of the Church and of their unity in Christ. The church held all things in common (Ac 2:44; 4:32). This was not so much a reference to material goods as to their common share in the Gospel, in their sufferings and blessings; if one part of the Body suffered, the whole Body suffered. And if one part of the Body celebrated, the whole Body celebrated. So as needs arose in one church, another church willingly shared what they had with them. This principle of commonality was a further basis of Paul’s calling upon the gentiles to share their material goods with the Jews.

When Paul asks for their prayers, this same principle of commonality underlies his request. He asks them to *strive together* with him by praying (1) that he will be able to proclaim the gospel; (2) that Jerusalem will find his service to them acceptable and pleasing; (3) that he will be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea; and (4) that he will finally come to them, so that, once together, they may refresh one another.

How then may we, as believers, refresh one another and rest from our striving? We can obey those whom God has placed over us (Heb 13:17); we can encourage the weak and not abuse our freedom; we can endure *together*, hold all things in common, pray to God for the desires of another’s heart, avoid gossip, divisions, and arguments, hold fast to the truth of God, and proclaim the gospel with great joy. In these ways, the struggles and the opposition which we must endure in the world will *cease* at the gates of the Church. The Church will become a safe haven, a place in which we are welcomed, refreshed, and nourished. It is the pasture of the Lord (Jn 10:9), and he is our Good Shepherd (Jn 10:14-15).

Romans Chapter 16

In his closing remarks and greetings we see something extraordinary about Paul and his relationship with the churches. There is a familiarity and warmth that is almost foreign to the church today. Here is a church at Rome that Paul has never visited, and yet he is intimately familiar not only with this church and with its practices, but with its people. Moreover, they are intimately familiar with him. He knew them well enough, and they knew him well enough, that he could chastise, educate, and impose upon them. He mentions nearly 30 people, some of whom have served with him, risked their lives for him, and suffered with him in prison. They are known not just in their own churches, but *among* the churches. “All the churches of the gentiles” are indebted to them. Rome has become a refuge for those imprisoned for the faith – including Paul’s “relatives.” Paul not only knows *of* them, but all *about* them, and he evidences a very deep affection *for* them, which apparently is mutual.

And so he asks them to put away their divisions and the stumbling blocks that they put in one another’s way; to avoid not only the teaching which is false, but the teachers of these falsehoods. He condemns such individuals as people who serve their own appetites instead of Christ. They are deceivers, using smooth talk and flattery to persuade naïve believers to accept them as authoritative and side with them in advocating their lies. Can you imagine that kind of sermon in today’s churches?

And what are these lies? Based on what Paul has written in this letter, we can conclude that he is at least referring to the Judaizers who insisted that gentiles be circumcised and obey the ceremonial laws; he may also refer to those who thought that works are the basis of our salvation rather than grace alone; or to those who thought of themselves as spiritually superior and therefore appointed themselves judges over others; and he clearly refers to those who promoted two classes of believers – Jews and Gentiles.

In closing, Paul prays that the believers at Rome might be established by the gospel and the proclamation of Christ. Yet these alone would not establish them. Instead, Paul makes it clear that only God is able to establish them. The gospel is the *means* by which he does it. The Gospel contains the revelation of God’s plan of salvation from long ages past, revealed and made known to them through his prophetic writings. And what is God’s intent in all this? That all nations might believe and obey him. In fact, by believing and obeying, they too will be established. *We are saved through faith alone, but not through a faith which is alone.* Remember Jesus’ words in his final prayer that the Bible is the very means of our sanctification (Jn 17:17) – but it will not sanctify unless we are willing to obey, applying its truth to the Way we live.

This is the challenge we so often miss and perhaps hope to avoid: we must be tested and proven in our faith, just as Abraham’s faith was tested with Isaac. Only then may we grow and be strengthened. Faith that is conceived in our mind and expressed with our lips cannot give birth to godliness without willful action. We out-work our salvation (Phil 2:12). *This* is our sanctification. We study God’s word, apply its principles to the circumstances of our life, and then endure adversity to test and prove our faith. This cycle begins anew every day and it never stops while we live. In this way, we are increasingly matured in Christ and conformed to his image by the power of his Spirit. And at the end of our journey, when our striving is also at an end, the greeting we long to hear from our loving Father will be this:

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

May your journey be fruitful, your paths straight, and your faith unwavering, until our Lord returns.

William H. Gross