

Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans

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Section 1

What is Christianity?

As a foundation for the commentary on Romans it seems good to lay the foundation of exactly what is the meaning of Christianity?

Part 1

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

In this one sentence -- better than perhaps any other place in the Bible -- is a definition of Christianity. It tells us the meaning of Christianity: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col.1:27) There is a lot that goes into that, and there's a lot that emerges from it, but in the final analysis, a Christian is one in whom Christ dwells. Thus, Christianity is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We can talk about law and grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the legal aspects of the Redemption -- and we will -- but if we do not see that Christianity is CHRIST IN US -- the believer -- and that the Christian life is His life through the believer, we will be talking in circles. Therefore, we must lay a proper foundation before we discuss law and grace.

Christ In You Fulfills the Word of God

I want to look at this passage in Colossians 1 in a little more detail. I want to back up a bit to verse 25 where Paul begins to talk about his ministry. He says that he...

...was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given to him.

That word, "dispensation," means, "distribution of property." That's what the word comes from in the New Testament Greek. And so, Paul is talking about a ministry wherein he is assigned by God the task of receiving the Truth, and then distributing it to other people, through Jesus Christ. And he says, I was made a minister in this way...

...according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you TO FULFILL THE WORD OF GOD.

Now that's a big statement. Paul is saying that his ministry that was given to him by God was to FULFILL THE WORD OF GOD. So there's something about this ministry that brings to fullness the Word of God -- fulfills everything that God intended -- going all the way back to the book of Genesis. Paul's ministry -- and he wasn't alone in this ministry -- but it was a ministry, that by God, was intended to bring to a fullness the Word of God; the revelation of God; the purpose and plan of God.

Now in verse 26, he begins to talk about this purpose or Word of God as a MYSTERY. In those days the word, "mystery," meant, "something that was hidden," but it carried with it the fact that what WAS hidden was NOW being revealed. All of that is what is meant by the word, "mystery," in the New Testament. And Paul is going to say exactly that about this great mystery of, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." He's going to say that he was given this ministry, "according to the dispensation of God, to fulfill the word of God" -- a

MYSTERY which, "had been hidden from ages and from generations, but now (in Paul's time) is made manifest to his saints."

Now take note of exactly what Paul is saying: The truth of, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" -- Paul is telling us that that Truth -- that reality -- fulfills the Word of God. And if you think about it, what else would? Everything God has ever said -- everything God has revealed through his written Word, or any other way, was all unto the plan and purpose of this tremendous mystery that HAD been hidden, but NOW is revealed of, "Christ in you." And Paul is saying that this incredible reality of CHRIST IN YOU was a MYSTERY that was hidden from ages past and generations past, but now -- in Paul's time -- is revealed.

The Old Covenant

We need to understand that all through the Old Covenant -- even though all of it is about Christ -- it is nevertheless ONLY about Christ in type and shadow. No one under the Old Covenant was ever indwelt by Jesus Christ by the means of the Spirit of God. No one was. The spirit of God was not IN them, but only WITH them. (John 14:17)

There are people today who are ignorant of this fact and deny it -- teachers and preachers demand that the people who were saved under the Old Testament Covenant had Christ in them -- just like we do today. No. Now they WERE saved -- they were saved by the SAME Jesus, and they were saved by that same Jesus, "by grace through faith." But they were saved under the Old Covenant -- they had a pointing forward to the Passover lamb who would eventually be Jesus Christ -- and they put their faith in that Christ in anticipation of the day He would come and do a redemptive work.

And so to make a long story short is that they were saved by the same Christ -- by grace through faith. But the experience that they had in this life of Christ was not, "Christ in them, the hope of glory." The experience in this life, under the Old Covenant, was that the Holy Spirit was WITH them -- but never IN them.

This is very important to distinguish. Why in the world do we think there were two covenants if we think that everything that happened under the Old Covenant was the same as it was under the New? No. In reality, the New Covenant IS, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The old wasn't -- it was Christ in type and shadow.

And so, people under the Old Covenant had the spirit of God WITH them -- but never IN them. This is again emphasized throughout the New Testament. I noted above that Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of John, told His very disciples -- at a point that was days before His crucifixion and resurrection -- He said to them, "The Spirit of God has been WITH you, but will be IN you." (John 14:16-17) He also continually talked about the fact that unless He ascended to heaven, that He could not return -- by the means of the spirit to dwell IN people. It's the entire theme of those discourses in John 14,15, and

16. When He talks about the purpose for which the spirit of God would be given He continually says, "The spirit of God cannot be IN YOU until I go -- the spirit cannot be given until I go away." (John 16:7) And then He defined what He MEANT by that: He said the spirit of God was WITH you, but shall be IN you. (THAT is what Jesus meant when He said the spirit could not be given until He went away -- He meant, "given to be IN them.")

So all through the Old Testament -- you can even take it all the way back to the book of Genesis if you want to -- the spirit of God was WITH people. But that is not a light thing; that's not a little thing. God did tremendous things through His Spirit that was WITH people -- but the Spirit of God was never IN people. Jesus Christ dwelt in NO ONE until the day of Pentecost was fulfilled -- no one was born again until that day -- the church and did not begin until that day.

This is why once that day happened that Peter was able to get up and preach a sermon. That's why for the first time the disciples were free to go out in the ministry. Remember, Jesus said, "You are not to go out until that day comes -- you are to tarry in Jerusalem until that day comes." They had to have an inward life and revelation which they did not have before. What they did have before was the spirit WITH them -- and the beginnings of light and Truth about Jesus.

When Jesus asked them, "Who do you say that I am?," Peter was able to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus was able to say, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Peter, but My Father which is in heaven." That revelation was not yet Christ IN them. How could He be IN them? He was standing right there in front of them in the flesh. No. Jesus had to live His perfect life, go to the cross, die, and be resurrected, and ascend to the heaven -- a fully completed redemption -- BEFORE He could, by the spirit of God, come back down and join people to Himself and dwell IN them.

The Revealed Mystery: Christ In You

In Colossians 1, Paul is saying that this mystery of, "Christ in you," has been hidden from ages and generations past -- but now is made manifest to His saints -- saints to whom God, "would make known what is the riches of this mystery, even among the Gentiles."

This makes more sense once we remember that in ages past it was thought that whatever God was doing was only for the Jews. But now this mystery -- CHRIST IN YOU -- which had not been revealed before now -- was now revealed as possible for ALL people: Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, and all of the rest of humanity.

Sure. In Galatians 3 we read Paul stating, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." So Paul says that God is now making this mystery known -- not just among the Jews -- but among the Gentiles.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory," is the fulfillment of the Word of God. It is what God was working towards since the sin of Adam.

But Paul doesn't stop there -- he doesn't say that the goal and the purpose of God is simply to get Christ dwelling in us and then we are done. No. He speaks further about the purpose for which Christ dwells in us. He says,

Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect or mature in Christ.

And so we are not only to receive Christ, and be joined to Him in spirit -- that's the BEGINNING of a purpose – unto a greater purpose – but NOT the end of any purpose. It's the beginning -- and that greater purpose is that we may become mature in Jesus Christ.

Part 2

Soul vs. Spirit

How does Christ dwell within the believer? Paul says, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (I Cor. 6:17) We are baptized into Christ; united with Him by the spirit of God in resurrection union.

This leads us into another related Truth that is foundational to this whole truth of Christ in us: The Truth of the separation between soul and spirit in each believer.

When we say we are joined to the Lord and become one spirit with Him, as noted, we might call that, "resurrection union." We can also call this union, "the new creation in Christ Jesus." "If any man is in Christ," Paul says in II Corinthians 5, "he is a new creature." And so are joined to the Lord in one spirit – this is the new creation in Christ. It can also be called, "the new man," but the joining is strictly SPIRITUAL.

We have to understand that you are not joined to the Lord physically. No. Neither are we joined to the Lord and made one, "soul man," with Him. In fact, our body and our soul are outside of that SPIRITUAL joining with the Lord.

If we would draw a big imaginary circle around our spiritual union with Christ -- then WITHIN that circle would be new life in Christ; the new creation in Christ; that resurrection union. But everything OUTSIDE of that circle would remain natural -- your physical body -- and the soul dimension of your natural makeup. These are not joined to the Lord. Thus, our spiritual union with Christ automatically creates a separation in each believer between spirit -- that which is joined to the Lord -- and soul -- that which is natural, that is, that which is NOT joined to the Lord.

This is the division in each believer of flesh vs. spirit -- and of course, we are told these are contrary one to the other. And so we need to understand this division. If we don't understand that we have two natures in each believer we will begin to try to find the new life -- to try to know Christ -- in the part of our makeup that is NOT joined to Him. We will be confused; we may become deceived. No. We are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. That is HOW Christ dwells in us. The rest of us -- body and soul man -- are not joined to Him.

Now, it is the will of God in this age that as Christ is formed in us, and we grow to know Him, that our minds be renewed, and that Christ impact our soul; that Christ impact our mind; that Christ impact what we do with our body. Absolutely. This is sanctification. But the body and soul man -- in this age -- are never saved. They come under the government and impact of resurrection life in Jesus Christ.

The Eternal Purpose of God

So the meaning of Christianity begins with the reality of Jesus Christ in us. We are joined to Him, and made one spirit with Him -- everything that Jesus Christ is doing is built on this reality. Jesus said, "I will build My church -- upon the Rock." What is the Rock? The Rock is the revelation to us, and in us, of who Jesus Christ is -- the foundation of that -- the rock of that; the reality of that; is Christ in us, the hope of glory. We have nothing if we don't have Him in us. So that's the first point: Christ in you, personally and individually, the hope of glory.

Now, that's not an end unto itself. God has a purpose for which He has joined us to His Son in spirit. It's a purpose, yes, that does begin in this age -- but will find its fullness and completeness in the next age. In this age, we are talking about, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We are talking about full and complete redemption for the person in whom Christ dwells -- in this age -- the redemption of the spirit. In the next age -- it is THEN that the body and the soul man is also redeemed.

But it's all unto an even greater purpose of God: He has redeemed us in Christ so that we may be part of the great purpose of Jesus as Lord -- not only over the entire Earth, but over all of creation. And we are to be part of that -- we are called to be coheirs with Him in an inheritance. But what God is doing in us through Christ in this age is not JUST for this age -- it is to take us on into the next age -- on the BASIS of what He is doing in this age -- that we may live with Him, and move with Him, and reign and rule with Him forever. "Redemption," means Jesus Christ as Lord over all -- and we might add -- that the life of Christ IN ALL -- in all, of course, who will receive -- because some will NOT.

Part 3

Jesus is Lord

And so, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," BEGINS that purpose in this age, in the believer. Now, on the heels of that -- what we need to understand is that God intends, through the life of Christ in us, is to bring us personally under Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now what does that mean, and how does that work? Well, again, this goes back to this foundational truth that I just shared -- and that is so essential to grasp -- that if we have Christ in us, then He IS life in us. In fact, Colossians 3:4 says, "Christ, who IS our life." So we receive from above through this Person, Jesus Christ -- by means of the spirit -- a life -- resurrection life -- a life that we were not born with, naturally speaking. You and I have received from the outside of us, INTO us FROM the outside of us, life from above -- His life. It's not human life -- it is the life of Jesus Christ.

And so this is a life that is, "other than," natural, human life -- it is really a Person who is, "other than," anything that we were born with into this world -- and that is the life of Christ in us. He IS our life. That's the LIFE, if you will, that is, "inside of that circle," that I mentioned -- it is what we receive in Christ. But what remains, "outside of that circle," is the natural man; what remains is that life that we were born into this world with. And so again, we have the two natures; we have the two lives.

God Almighty intends for us to fully come into the reality of Jesus Christ the Person as our life, and in doing so He intends to deliver us from that old life. This is how Jesus Christ truly becomes our personal Lord.

Now this is also why Jesus Christ, in Matthew 16, said to his disciples, "If any man would come after Me, he must deny himself -- deny that old self life -- pick up his cross daily, and follow Me."

How many understand that right there Jesus is not only talking about what HIS cross did for us, but He brings this down to a personal level? He is talking about how the cross needs to be worked out personally IN US. He was saying, "If any man would come after Me, he must pick up the cross, for whosoever would lose their personal lives; their natural life; their self ownership -- by picking up this cross daily -- will, in fact, find ME as their life." He's telling us in this passage that if we will lose our lives into the hands of Jesus Christ -- under the outworking of the cross -- our self life; our self ownership, then the Christ with whom we are joined in spirit will more and more increase; will more and more find release; will more and more be revealed in us. HE will increase -- as the influence of the old life is broken.

And so we have these two lives. Christ in us must increase -- as to release and reality -- and our old life; our self-ownership must decrease -- under the work

of the cross. This is how Jesus becomes our personal Lord. It is spiritual maturity.

Whatever It Takes

This is, of course, what God is doing in every trial of faith. A trial of faith is not to punish you. A trial of faith is not because God's mad at us, or hates us, or because we are horrible, ugly people, and God is trying to fix us. No. A trial of faith -- the work of the cross -- is DELIVERANCE. It is 100% positive, and FOR us. It's a matter of God chastising us to get us on the basis of Jesus Christ as our life; to set us free from the confines of the old creation; to set us free from the bondages that hinder life in Christ.

This is why Peter said, "the trial of your faith, more precious than gold." God wants to establish us and make it possible for us to walk with Christ as our life -- to live from out of Christ as our life. We can't do that on our own. God must do that, and break the old life, so that if will respond to what He's doing, we can then will come and walk with Christ as our life.

If there's nothing else that we can do, we can tell GOD, "to do whatever it takes to bring us into this reality (of Jesus Christ.)" This is, of itself, a commitment -- it is, of itself, is a losing of your life. Now there is still a lot of work to do. We must follow up on our commitment when God DOES do, "whatever it takes." We have to obey Him, and follow Him, pick up the cross and lose our life in practical ways. But the commitment starts with an unconditional surrender of ourselves to God for, "whatever it takes," to bring us into the fullness of life in Christ. Jesus said this in Matthew 16. He said, "You must lose yourself -- your right to yourself -- in order to find Me," Jesus was saying, "as your life."

Part 4

Yet Not I, But Christ

Now, there are a number of other passages which state the same Truth. One of the best is found in Galatians 2:20. Paul is talking there to people in Christ – to those who are, “joined to the Lord in one spirit with Him.” He is talking about himself as one in whom Christ dwells. But he says, “I am crucified WITH Christ.”

Now notice: Paul KNEW that Christ was crucified FOR him. Without that we have nothing. But it is BECAUSE Christ was crucified FOR us that we are able to say with Paul that, “We are crucified WITH Christ.” In other words, yes, we are dead in Christ – but we also need to take our place in HIS death by picking up that cross daily by faith. This is how it will be all worked out. But in God's eyes it is a thing done – although it needs to be worked out. Thus, Paul says, “I am crucified WITH Christ.” It is finished -- a thing done. But look at the effects of this reality: “But nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ.” If Christianity is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” then the outworking of the Christian life can be described as, “Yet not I, but Christ.” That's the outworking of the finished reality of Christ in us. Really, it's the end to which God wants to reach in us through the work of the cross; through the work of being crucified with Christ. Again: We must decrease that He might increase.

If you want to gather up what the attitude of a Christian person ought to be -- if you want to gather that up from all the verses that you can find in the Bible-- then right here summarizes it nicely: In the end, a Christian person -- his attitude, his faith; his entire life is supposed to witness to this truth: “Yet not I, but Christ.”

In conjunction with this, we are brought to another Truth that we need to see. In talking about, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” and in talking about God's desire that we get to the point where it is, “Yet not I, but Christ” -- what does that look like? How does that work in an individual?

How Does This Work in the Individual?

Back to the question: How is the reality of, “Yet not I, but Christ,” manifested in a believer? Well, first of all, we must be delivered from ourselves, and from our preoccupation with ourselves -- even religiously. But we have teachers walking around today that are teaching us how to be MORE occupied with ourselves -- only a, “positive way.” What a grief that must be to the heart of God! Paul said it here in Gal. 2:20: We've got to get to the point where we live in the reality of the Christ who dwells in us: “Yet not I, but Christ.”

“Yet not I, but Christ.” How does that work? Somebody once said that those who manifest Christ the MOST are the LEAST aware of it. That is how it works when we are living in the reality of, “Yet NOT I, but Christ.” Christ is manifesting Himself through us and in us, and this becomes -- and this is sort

of pun -- this becomes, "natural." It is never achieved through preoccupation with yourself. It's achieved by LOSING yourself.

God Almighty did not send his son to bring us into a condition of high self-esteem. Neither did He come, "to beat low self-esteem over the head." No. What He came to do is bring us to where we don't care about ANY of that anymore. He came to DELIVER us from self so we could say, "Yet not I, but Christ."

Now the way in which this is accomplished is through an on-going revelation -- in an inward way -- of Jesus Christ in us. You I cannot come to the place where we live for Christ as our life -- to where we say, "Yet not I, but Christ" -- unless Christ is formed in us, and we come into an inward realization of HIM.

An Inward Realization of Jesus Christ

In Gal. 4:19, Paul states this great Truth. In fact, he states it in a way that shows us just how important it is. The Galatians, of course, were a church that was under the law. And Paul was in travail -- hurting over the situation. And he tells them what he is in travail over -- he says in Galatians 4:19:

My little children, over whom I am in travail....until Christ BE FORMED IN YOU.

We know that this word translated, "formed" (in the NT Greek), means, "to be inwardly realized and expressed." So Paul travailed that the Galatian church, and of course, by extension, this would be God's travail for US -- that we would all come into an inward realization of Jesus Christ. Because without that we are not going to have -- if I can put it this way, "anything to work with." Without knowing Christ within we will have only ourselves within. We will live on the basis of the natural; on the basis of that old life -- on the basis of that old life that is outside of our joining to the Lord.

This is where millions live today who profess Christ. Millions are blinded to the reality of Jesus Christ within us. Thus, this would be God's travail for those of us who are blind to Christ: God would say to us, "I travail until Christ be formed in you; until you come into an inward realization of Jesus Christ."

If you read John 14, 15 and 16, you will see that this is the purpose for which the spirit of God is given: To reveal Jesus Christ TO us, and to reveal Jesus Christ IN us -- that Christ may become our life. That is the ONLY way -- as the process continues and we grow to know Christ -- that is the only way that we will ever be able to get to the place where we know and believe, "Yet not I, but Christ" -- let alone get to the place where we can truly say, "For the life we now live we live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved us and gave Himself for us."

And so God wants to bring you and I into an inward realization of Jesus Christ. How does God do that? Well, turn to II Cor. 4. Paul again is talking

about this very same Truth -- the very same foundational Truth of, "Christ in us, the hope of glory."

He says there in verse 7: "But we have this Treasure in an earthen vessel." How many see that this is, "Christ in you hope of glory?" Christ is the Treasure. He dwells IN an earthen vessel. That is another way of describing that we are, "joined to the Lord and become one spirit with Him" -- and yet there remains OUTSIDE of that spiritual union an EARTHEN vessel; a natural man. Paul differentiates between the two. He says, "We have this Treasure (Christ) IN an earthen vessel." There are the TWO natures.

Paul then says, "That the excellency of the power -- really of the life that has that power -- may be God, and not of us." How many again see in this verse, "Yet not I, but Christ?" Christ IN US is distinct FROM US. The Treasure will never be the earthen vessel -- and the earthen vessel will never be the Treasure. No -- it's Christ IN you. There is Christ -- and there is you.

One of the things that we will discover as we come into a realization of Christ is that Christ is, "other than us." And that's important because people continue to think that what God is doing in this age is giving us a THING called, "power," or that God, in this age, is doing stuff TO US -- called, "sanctification," and some of those other things we read in the Bible. We think that Jesus came to make our natural man, "look like Jesus." That's the Christianity that is taught in so many places today. But Jesus did not come by the spirit of God to make us, "look like Jesus." God does not act upon us via the spirit of God to make us, "look like Jesus," or to fix up the old man, or to make the earthen vessel look like a treasure. No. What Jesus IN US does -- as we come under the work across -- is cause us to decrease -- that He might increase. What happens if we are walking with God is that we begin to understand what it means to say, "Yet not I, but Christ." This is not about us looking like Jesus. It's about us being crucified so that Christ may be manifested in us, and through us. It's all Him and His life flowing. It's not us.

What do we think it means, "Yet not I, but Christ?" Think about the words themselves. How could they mean that Christianity is about Jesus fixing us up, and making us look like Him? It could never mean that; it doesn't mean that. Such thinking is totally contrary to the Bible.

No. "We have this Treasure IN an earthen vessel -- and because of this -- "the excellency of the power is OF God, and never of us."

Losing Our Life to Find Christ

Paul talks about trials and tribulations in verses 8 and 9, but it's all unto the purpose that we may, "always bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (II Cor. 4:10) I quoted earlier Matthew 16 where Jesus said that we need to pick up our cross daily and lose our life. Can we see that this (II Cor. 4:10) is nothing but a restatement of the same Truth? As we encounter situations -- both in the

physical realm and spiritual -- that are intended by God to be a cross to us – if we would just submit to God – if we would pick up those crosses and come to the place where we are, “bearing about,” in that natural life; in our body and soul man -- in those areas that are outside of our union with Christ – if we would come to the place where we, “bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” – THAT IS HOW we lose our life. That is how we come to say, “Yet NOT I.”

But how many understand that it would be quite a miserable and shallow Christianity if that was the end of the story. No. All of this is unto FREEDOM - - to experiencing life in Christ. “Always bearing about in the natural the dying of the Lord Jesus.” Why? “So that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” Can we see -- right there -- that we are NOT being made, “to LOOK like Jesus?” No. We are being crucified out of the way so that JESUS can look like Jesus through us.

Now, someone might say, “I don’t understand how that goes.” Well, it goes back to what I said earlier: Those who manifest Christ the MOST are the LEAST aware of it. IN other words, this isn't about you and I grabbing hold of ourselves and trying to act, or look, like Jesus. This isn't about us directing traffic, or following rules and principles. No. Neither is this about us going to seminars, or twelve-step programs, whereby we can, “build Christian character.” Rather, this is about us DYING -- coming under the work of the cross -- so that our preoccupation with ourselves; our self ownership -- might be utterly and completely shattered and broken -- so that now we can be preoccupied, if not obsessed, with the Person of Jesus.

The fact of the matter is -- there is no other outcome of walking with Christ – except THAT outcome. There is no other outcome if I want to walk in the Truth – than for God to bring me to the place where I say, “Yet not I, but Christ.” There is no other Truth if I want to go along in the purpose of God in Jesus Christ -- Jesus said, “IF any man would come after Me he must to lose himself to find Me.”

This is not a negative. It's not something that will destroy you. It's something that will bring you into true life. I had a lady walk up to me one time after I was talking about this at a Bible study and she said, “You are scaring me to death because I'm afraid that if I lose my life to Jesus Christ, God's going to destroy my marriage, or that one of my kids will die.” No -- you see -- this is a false concept of God. You lose your life to Jesus Christ, and the purpose of God is to heal families. How many know that in Christ is healing for marriages; in Christ is redemption? The, “abundant life,” that God wants to give us is HIS life. The abundant characteristic is that it brings resurrection life and healing to all. And so we need to get this straight.

These things are not easy for the flesh. There are times of horrible trial for the flesh – perhaps terrifying trials for some people -- it depends on God's purposes. But in the end, we, “bear about in the body that dying of the Lord

Jesus" – that is, we are, "crucified WITH Christ." But it is all unto the purpose, "that the life of Christ may be made manifest," in and through us. That is what it means to have, "Christ formed in you;" to have HIS LIFE come to govern. We live under a growing knowledge and realization of Christ. He comes to govern us – not by giving us orders -- but He comes to govern us through the knowledge of Himself, and through His love.

Now that's not possible unless we, "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus;" unless we experience what it means to be, "crucified WITH Christ." ONLY THEN will we be able to say, "Nevertheless I live -- yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Only then will be able to say that the life also of Jesus is made manifest in our body.

Part 5

Christ In Us is ALL

If you see what's being said here in II Cor. 4:10-11, you will see that this is not, and never will be, about US coming to, "look like Jesus." No. It will be about Christ manifesting Himself through us.

This Truth is important to see -- but if we see it, we will also be able to take that Truth and realize it with regard to a bunch of other Christian realities. For example: Sanctification. Most people have defined, "sanctification," as you and I coming to, "look like Jesus." Many believers think, "Okay. Jesus died to save us. And now that Jesus has died, and we ARE saved, and God has given us His spirit. So His spirit is going to act upon us, to do stuff to us, and to do stuff for us -- and this is going to result in us, "looking like Jesus." People talk about the holy spirit of God doing stuff to us to, "build character," or to bless us, or to do a work in us -- that will result in us having "patience," or result in us having a form of, "Christian character." Somehow we have developed an entire system -- but have omitted the Person of Christ. We have left Him out of it as the SOURCE -- as the One who IS our life. We have made it all about US and all about, "stuff that God is doing to us to make us look like Jesus."

But note: This is nothing more than saying that God intends to fix and repair the old man. No. Sanctification is NOT you and I coming to look like Jesus. Sanctification is CHRIST -- Christ living through us, and being seen in us.

Paul is talking about the Corinthian church; he is talking about the fact that none of them were famous; none of them were mighty in this world. In fact, he says in verse 28: "The base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen -- things which are nothing, to bring to naught things that are. "And God has done this," Paul says in first Corinthians 1:29, "that no flesh should glory in His presence." Then, on the heels of that statement, that no flesh -- that no natural man should ever have glory in the presence of God - - Paul says, "But of God are you IN Christ Jesus, who of God is MADE UNTO US wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Note that. Then he adds, "That accordingly, as it is written, he glories let him glory in the Lord." How many again see, "Yet not I, but Christ?"

All of these things, if we dare call them, "things" -- they are really dimensions of the life of Christ manifested in a human being -- they are all HIM. He says so -- he says Jesus Christ is MADE TO BE UNTO US wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. So what is righteousness in the human being? It is Christ; IT is Christ in you. We are NOT given a righteousness of our own. We are NOT acted upon by God and made a righteous being. No. We are given the embodiment of all righteousness -- Jesus Christ - - to live in us.

As I have said many times, "justification by faith," can be described in legal terms as, "God imputing to us the righteousness of His Son." Absolutely -- that's a great way of describing how God declares the sinner righteous -- in legal terms: God IMPUTES to us the righteousness of His Son. But that doesn't CHANGE anybody -- to simply legally dub them, "righteous." No. God does not merely impute to us the righteousness of His Son. God imparts to us Christ Himself -- who IS the righteousness of God. So, in other words, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," IS your righteousness. He is the ONLY righteousness you will ever have or experience. "God has made Christ to be unto us righteousness." And he also says that Christ is made to be unto us sanctification.

II Cor. 4 -- that we just read -- is really a description of how Christ is our sanctification. We, "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." That is sanctification. Paul in verse II Cor. 4:11 reiterates -- he says, "for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus's sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body."

So this is sanctification. It is what happens to a human being that encounters Christ; has living in them Jesus Christ. There is a death that comes -- and I'm talking about somebody that obeys and goes on with God in faith. There is a death that comes to everything that is natural -- in the sense of losing the ownership of that; death to the natural man being Lord. There's a death that comes to all of that -- a breaking of that earthen vessel -- so that the life of Jesus might be seen through the human being.

Now if you are listening to what I'm saying, how many see that there is no way under God's heaven that any LAW can accomplish this. There's no way that this can happen simply because you and I jump through religious hoops, attend seminars, or go through 12 step programs. There's no way that it can happen through human effort -- not even the best intended human religious effort. All of this is the result of, "Christ in us, the hope of glory" -- the meaning of Christianity. All of this is the result of having received from above HIS life. The process begins, and we begin to experience all that Christ IS. We begin to experience Jesus Christ in his death -- we are joined to, and implanted into, His death WITH Him, and we begin to experience Jesus Christ in His resurrection life.

All Things Given IN Christ

From here, we can move onto the last thing I want to mention for today. Christ in us, the hope of glory -- bringing us to the place where we lose our life, that we may find Him as our life -- bringing us to the place where we live in the reality of, "Yet not I, but Christ" -- bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Christ may be manifested in and through us -- you gather all that up and you begin to see that in Jesus Christ is ALL that God has for the believer -- and in Jesus Christ is ALL that there will

ever be – and in Jesus Christ, and through Christ, God will do ALL that He ever intends to do. There are NOT other people, experiences, other power, other things, that God's going to do – nothing aside from what He is going to do in His Son. No. It is all in Christ. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end. God Almighty has wrapped up everything that He has to give to human beings, and wrapped up everything He ever intends to do, in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ -- and there is nothing outside of Christ.

This is the magnitude of Jesus as Lord. In Him is redemption for the entirety of all of creation -- and we are joined to Him and have become one with Him in spirit. That is an incredibly awesome thought. Colossians chapter 2 -- just a little taste of this -- Paul talks about it to the Colossians, and to us. He is talking about Christ in Colossians 2:3:

In Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So if, as a Christian, you want to come into the reality of wisdom -- if you want experience the treasures of God -- if you want to know God -- if you want to come into knowledge and discernment – you will not get it in any way, or by any means, other than to know Jesus. IN CHRIST is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So in other words, only as CHRIST is unfolded can you and I come into the treasures and the wisdom that are wrapped up IN HIM. It's all IN Christ.

It is through the knowing; it is through the forming; it is through the coming into that inward realization of Christ in us that these things are unfolded to us. They are not found some other way or through some other means.

And Paul warns us – he says, “This I say – (i.e., that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ) -- lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.” In other words, lest any man should say, “It is by this or that means (other than in Christ) that you can come into the reality of God.”

And isn't that (i.e., this exact false teaching) everywhere in the church today? People suggesting that this thing or that thing is THE WAY. No. These are NOT the way! Jesus said, “I AM the Way.” And Paul warns about that here, and then over in Colossians 2:9-10. He says, “For in Christ dwells ALL the fullness of deity -- bodily.” He says, “You are complete in Him.” The awesome thought is that in Christ is the fullness of all that God is, and all that God has – BUT -- this is the SAME Christ with Whom we are joined and made one in spirit. He is IN US.

All of this simply gets back to Romans 8:32 where Paul states that God, “has given us all things freely in His Son.” Everything we have talked about today is freely given by grace. God has given us, “Christ in us, the hope of glory;” the great mystery; the great fulfillment of the purpose of God -- He's given us Christ in us the hope of glory freely. And in Christ He has given us freely all

things. That is not only for His purpose in this life, but it is for the purpose of God through Christ unto the eternal ages.

That's the meaning of Christianity: Christ in us, the hope of glory" -- and everything that He means -- in this life, and then in the ages yet to come.

Part 6

A New Creation

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed over... (II Cor. 5:17)

We are seeing that to be baptized into Christ – united with Him in His death and resurrection – is not merely religious language. Believers really ARE united with Christ in a spiritual union that carries eternal impacts. Yet HOW are we united with Christ? What constitutes this union? Well, we are united in spirit with Him by the Holy Spirit. Again, believers are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. (I Cor. 6:17) That is HOW Christ dwells in us; how the believer is IN Christ. It is the outcome of being baptized or planted into Christ.

As important as it is to see that we are united with Christ in spirit, it is likewise important to see that we are NOT united with Christ in our soul or psychic nature – i.e., our natural man – and neither are we united with Him physically. Not in this age. In this age we are united with Him only in spirit.

This Truth is brought out all the more in the verse above – adjusted for the proper reading from the original Greek. If anyone is IN CHRIST – this is one who has been joined to Him; baptized into Him – if anyone is IN CHRIST then that person is a NEW creation. In other words, what constitutes the new creation in Christ is the spiritual union of His spirit and our spirit. That is the new man; that is what is born from above. But there is more. As we see from the adjusted reading, “old things are passed over.” What, “old things?” Well, “old things,” are all of the dimensions of your old man in Adam. The old things are that which are crucified with Christ – those aspects of our being that are NOT joined to the Lord. Those dimensions are passed over as far as being incorporated into the new creation in Christ.

So we have a separation in each believer between that which IS joined to the Lord, and that which is NOT joined to Him. That which IS joined to Him – our human spirit – is regenerated and saved – that joining births the new creation IN THIS AGE. That which is NOT joined to Him remains outside of the new creation – it is, “passed over” – it is not incorporated into the new creation.

This wonderful Truth is gathered up in the next verse, II Cor. 5:18:

Behold all things all things are become new and all things are out from God.

Note that the spiritual union of the believer with Christ – that human spirit with Christ by the spirit of God – births the new creature; constitutes the new creature – but that it is Christ that brings ALL that is of eternal value. “All things,” that are of the eternal are brought to this union by HIM, and nothing is

brought by us. In short, He is the source of all that is of God. We are the recipients.

The fact that all that is NEW is out from Christ goes hand in hand with the fact that all that is OLD – which would be out from us -- is not joined to Him. This is a NEW CREATURE – if you will, a different kind of human being from what has ever existed before. Not born OF the Adam race, but born of God in Christ.

Experiencing Jesus Christ

These Truths are embedded in Paul's teaching in Romans 6 through 8. They are the realities that emerge from the finished and foundational work of Christ: We are baptized INTO Him; buried WITH Him. We have been planted INTO His death – our old man has died WITH Him. We have therefore been raised WITH Him. But they are likewise the realities that make it possible for the believer to go on to live as Paul states: Yield your members unto God as instruments of righteousness. The believer is a new creation in Christ – but this does not bypass us or happen without our experiencing Christ. No. Christ is IN the believer through this new birth and spiritual union, but now wants to both live IN and THROUGH that same believer. We walk with Him in that by faith and obedience.

Being a new creation in Christ is not merely a legal status. It is not merely a LABEL. It is HIS LIFE – it is the Treasure that is Christ in the earthen vessel that is the believer. And it is God's will that Christ be expressed and manifested. This cannot happen without our voluntary surrender to God; without an active faith and participation.

When we are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him – this is a one-time, one for all, finished event – at that point we are complete IN HIM. (Col. 2:10) There is nothing left of Christ to receive. In fact, not only has God given us ALL of Himself by giving us ALL of Christ, but God has given to us ALL things IN His Son. There is nothing God has left to give:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has, blessed us with all spiritual blessings OUR FROM the heavenly realm in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)

For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him. (Col. 2:9-10)

Now note: We do receive all of Christ, and all that God had given in Him, at salvation. But we do not immediately discover or experience all that we have already received in Christ – that requires a lifetime of growth. We must go on – not to receive MORE of Christ – but go on to discover what we have received. This is not a theological or academic discovery. It is an inward, spiritual REALIZATION that emerges from Christ Himself; that emerges from the One with Whom we are joined in spiritual, resurrection union.

In a nutshell – and we will see more of this in Romans 7 – we must actually experience Galatians 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

And likewise, II Cor. 4:

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. (II Cor. 4:10-11)

This is the experience that emerges from the foundation that Paul is laying here in Romans 6. Because we have been united with Christ in both His death and resurrection, we will begin to experience and evidence the impacts of His death and resurrection. It will work towards a life that proclaims: "Yet not I, but Christ!"

God will begin, by His spirit – through a realization of Christ – to renew our minds according to Christ. This will alter, yes, our thinking, but more than that, our perspective. "The eyes of our understanding will be enlightened that we may KNOW....." (see Eph. 1:18) We will begin to experience the Christ with Whom we are joined – begin to experience all that is in Him – and this will renew our minds, which will then open our hearts so that we can believe and obey God. But the source of it all, despite the fact that we must live in a physical body, despite the fact that we continue to carry a natural man and a sin nature, is Jesus Christ Himself – for all that is of God is OUT FROM HIM as the only source.

Part 7

Losing to Find

Here we must repeat a Truth discussed earlier. If we were to want one passage that gets to the core of this great experience of death and resurrection with Christ – and the impacts of that experience – we would need only to turn to Matthew 16:

If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 16:24-25)

Here we see that there is only one destiny for the old man. It is not to be fixed up. It is not to find a way to get God to bless the old life in Adam. The only destiny for the old life in Adam is to be crucified with Christ, in other words -- death. If we try to make any other destiny out of this, we are going to end up deceived.

Everywhere in Christianity today, what we essentially have is Christianity presented without the personal cross; without the personal need to be crucified with Christ. Oh, people preach the cross of Christ in the sense that Christ was crucified FOR US -- but so many are blinded to the fact that we have to be crucified WITH Him. All of that is pushed aside. But when you do that, you do not have Christianity anymore.

We need to realize that being crucified with Christ is FREEDOM. It is our salvation being worked out – not merely unto the death of the old, but unto life in the new. If we want to actually LIVE in Christ, and experience Him, we must enter into the baptism into His death. It is always life FROM death. You cannot bypass death and walk in His life.

Nothing could be clearer from the Word of God. And yet today we find a Christianity that is not the product of life from death in Him – but which bypasses the personal cross. Everywhere we have a Christianity that is essentially the old man in Adam turned into a Christian – the old man in Adam given a religion in the name of Christ; offered blessings that are found only IN Christ apart from experiencing Christ Himself.

It is impossible to experience the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Christ without first experiencing Christ Himself. It is impossible to experience the spiritual blessings that God has given in Christ without first experiencing Christ Himself. All that God has given is found only IN HIM – all of these realities are of HIS LIFE.

But Jesus clearly stated, "IF anyone would come after Me.....that person must lose their life in order to find ME as their life." You and I cannot experience Christ – cannot experience CHRIST AS OUR LIFE – and thus cannot experience

all that God has given IN HIM – unless we LOSE our lives to Him. For it is only if we lose OUR lives that we can find Him as our life.

But there is more. Only if we lose our lives, and find Him as our life, can we truly realize Christ and have our mind renewed – only then can we KNOW Him. John stated, “In Him was life, and that life was the LIGHT of men.” (John 1:4) And so we have this:

Lose OUR life = find Christ as our life = realize Christ, Who is the only LIGHT of humanity.

We cannot get free from SINS unless we surrender THE SIN in which all SINS are rooted – self-ownership. We must give OURSELVES to Jesus Christ. If we do not know how, then ask God, “to do whatever it takes,” to bring us into this reality. And then when God does do, “whatever it takes,” we pick up that cross and follow Him.

In Romans 6, when Paul speaks of dying and being raised in Christ, he is speaking of foundational Truths. These are once-for-all finished realities established by Christ in His Redemptive work. But they are dynamic that will forever remain and be carried in the Person of Christ. When we are joined to Him we begin to experience death in Him – yet unto resurrection in Him. In other words, it IS finished, but not that which is finished must be progressively experienced so that we might experience and know Christ Himself.

Section 2

Commentary on Romans 1-5

Romans

Chapter 1

The Power of God Unto Salvation

The opening chapter of Romans begins with little hint of what will follow. Paul says nothing about how God justifies the sinner, and nothing about the Body of Christ. But he does begin to lay the groundwork for those later Truths. He introduces the gospel and describes the spiritual condition of those who "hold the Truth in unrighteousness." All of this is intended to lead us up to seeing that Christ, and Christ alone, is the solution for our terrible state in Adam.

1: 1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.

The word "servant" is the Greek "doulos." It actually means "bond slave." It is the most servile term in the Greek language. It speaks of one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another. It is a slave who is bound to his master unto death. This term would have been well-known to those of Paul's time. It aptly describes Paul's relationship to Christ, although in Paul's case, he was a slave voluntarily and willingly.

The term "doulos" allows for no possibility of the slave living his life for himself. This is the relationship the Christian is to have with the one and only Lord, Jesus Christ. The big difference between our relationship with Christ, and the relationship of the "doulos" with an earthly master, is obviously the voluntary nature of it. But there is more. Our Master gave Himself for us, that is, He became a bond-slave unto God on our behalf. No earthly master can make that claim.

The apostle Paul was the only apostle who didn't know Jesus during the Lord's earthly life. It is remarkable that God would choose such a one to write more of the New Testament than any of the other apostles. In fact, it is remarkable that God would choose someone who was possibly the greatest Pharisee who ever lived. But God knew something about Paul. He knew that a converted Paul would have a point of reference for true freedom and the grace of God which few others had. Why? Because once you have thoroughly bought into legalism, and been set free, you can speak of it's error through experience. Your discernment of it will be keen. Likewise, because you have been steeped in error, you will have a greater appreciation

for the Truth. You'll be able to see angle of it otherwise not easily seen. Of course that doesn't mean legalism is a good thing. It just means God uses even legalism to eventually show us Truth. All of God's children are, to one degree or another, deceived before they see the Truth. In Paul's case, his deception happened to be legalism. And God used it to bless many.

Paul says he is "separated" unto the gospel. This means more than the fact that he was set apart to preach the gospel. That he was. But anytime God "separates" someone to do something for Him, it is always because He intends to do something IN that person. Paul's calling as an apostle was not a calling to some glamorous place in the limelight. It was a calling to preach the gospel, yes, but more importantly, it was a calling to BECOME an example of everything the good news proclaimed.

1: 2 Which He had promised afore by the prophets in the holy scriptures,

1: 3 Concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh,

1: 4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead.

It was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead which finally declared Him to be the Son of God. Why? Didn't His death do that too? Yes, but by itself His death accomplished only the death of sin. It imparted no life. Paul will tell us later, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:10) The resurrection of Christ is the salvation of man. It was through that resurrection that Jesus was fully and finally declared to be the one and only Son of God.

1: 5 By Whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.

Here we read the term "obedience to the faith." It's easy to just skim past it, but it is a concise summary of the gospel of God. God wants obedience, yes, but He wants it because we believe, not because we don't. Note that: Many of us obey God, not because we believe Him, but because we don't. In other words, we obey out of FEAR, not faith. We obey to avoid the punishment, or the disfavor we think we'll get if we disobey. This motive for

obedience may result in us obeying laws and rules, but it is not "obedience to the faith." Faith motivates us to obey God because we love Him, and because we believe and know Him. The difference between these two motivations for obedience is the difference between legalism and the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

1: 6 Among Whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ.

1: 7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father..." That simple phrase embodies the gospel Truth. Yet because it is merely the salutation in this letter to the Romans, we easily pass over it. Do we realize that grace and peace really ARE God's heart towards us? If we would truly believe that statement, the way the Bible defines "believe," our lives would be transformed under the power of it.

Most Christians do not live as if God's attitude towards them is grace and peace. Oh, we SAY we believe it, but many of us simply believe it as a fact or doctrine. The fear, false guilt, and condemnation we allow to continually govern our lives betray the fact that we really don't believe it in any way that makes a difference. The way in which we try to appease God with good works reveals that we really think He's mad at us; ready to punish us. But the Truth of the gospel embodied in this letter to the Romans is clear: God loves us. And His love translates into grace and peace towards us. These realities stand behind what Paul will later call "the power of the gospel."

1: 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

When Paul uses the term, "the whole world," he, of course, means primarily the known Christian community. His statement might also be considered prophetic, in that this letter speaking of the faith of the Romans would be preserved for two thousand years, and indeed, accessible to much of the world during the church age.

Note that Paul thanks, not the Romans for their faith, but God for the Romans. This is an important distinction. The Romans have only believed the Truth. For that no one deserves applause. But the God who called them, and revealed the Truth to them -- He is to be thanked for doing so.

This applies to each one of us. How could credit go to us for simply believing the Truth? It can't. But thanks be to God for blessing us with it! To Him alone belongs all glory and honor.

God wants us to get away from the attitude of "how much I've suffered for God," and of "all that I've given up for God," or, of "how much I've obeyed God." All of that must go. Instead, He wants us to say, "How much Jesus has suffered for me;" "how much Jesus has done for me." Everything "I've done done for God" is unto one end: That He might use it to set me free; teach me about Himself. In the final analysis, even our sufferings and obedience are, yes, for God's ultimate glory, but also unto our freedom and eternal life.

1: 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

1:10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established

1:12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

What did Paul mean "that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift?" (1:11) The English blurs the meaning a bit. The word used for "impart" means "to give a share of." It contains the root "with." Paul is simply saying that he would like the Romans to share in the gift of the Holy Spirit which works through him so that they might be more established in Christ. This is confirmed by Paul's own explanation of what he means in verse 1:12.

To establish believers in Christ, or to edify and build them up in Christ, is the purpose of all spiritual gifts. Note that this is much different than establishing believers in a church, group, doctrine, or leader. It is likewise different than establishing believers in the Body itself. Believers do not get established in Christ by first becoming established in the Body, or any other vehicle. No. They are established in Christ first, as individuals. Only then is it possible for them to function as God intends in His Body. The personal

relationship with Christ is always the bedrock of Christianity. All else is a by-product or fruit. Thus, the spiritual condition of the Body at any point in time can always be traced back to the collective spiritual condition of the individual members.

What does Paul mean by "established -- in Christ?" He is certainly not speaking of salvation, for those to whom he wrote were saved. He is speaking about furthering their stability and maturity, of course. But how so?

Most of the rest of the letter tells us. The Truth of grace about which Paul writes in this letter will continually push us to become less and less "established" in ourselves, our works, our righteousness, and even our faith -- and more and more established in Jesus Christ and His finished work.

That is a simple Truth. It is THE gospel. But it is Truth which has become so buried beneath religiosity, and so crystallized into doctrine, that it almost seems like a new and revolutionary message.

**Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I
1:13 proposed to come unto you, (but I was let hereunto), that I might have
some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.**

Interesting that Paul wanted to come to them, but something always prevented it. It just goes to show that even the greatest men of God wanted to do things which God didn't want them to do. After all, had God wanted Paul to come to the Romans, He would have worked it out. It's not that Paul was in rebellion, mind you, it's just that he was human, and had human feelings for his brethren and friends.

God's ways are not our ways. Human thinking would have suggested that the Romans could have only benefited from visits from Paul. But God had reasons why He did not bring Paul. This should give us pause for thought when we think we know what is best, and God doesn't work it out. We can, in these situations, believe, even though we don't understand.

Have you ever become convinced that something was the will of God for you, only to see it smashed? Times like those can terrify us if our faith is weak. How could God allow us to be so deceived? He can allow it so that we might learn what it means to walk by faith, rather than by "leadings," or our own desires. And the fact is, there is no other way to learn it.

When God does allow something we thought HE wanted to be exposed as something WE alone wanted, He is actually answering our prayer for Truth and clarity in the knowledge of Himself. He is bringing us on to a maturity of faith which believes and walks without knowing where it is going.

1:14 I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

1:15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Paul thought of himself as a "debtor" to his fellowman, that is, as one who was a slave to none, but a servant to all. He was at the unconditional disposal of God for however God wanted to use him in the lives of others. Rather than feel as if others owed him, Paul felt that because of Christ, he was a debtor to all.

1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

In this passage we find several Truths. First, the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." Salvation for whom? "To everyone that believes." Here Paul begins to establish one of the cardinal Truths of Christianity: Salvation by faith alone. Paul spends the remainder of his letter to the Romans expanding upon this one Truth. He goes to great lengths to show us that salvation is not possible through the works of the law -- even though the law is holy, just, and good. Salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Note also a second Truth stated by Paul: The gospel is not merely a message ABOUT salvation. It is "the power of God UNTO salvation." In other words, the gospel isn't a doctrine. It doesn't merely tell us there is salvation. The gospel actually brings us into contact WITH salvation. It brings us into contact with the only One in whom there is salvation: Jesus Christ.

There is tremendous power in Truth. Truth cuts through confusion, darkness, and all that would bind and hinder. It sets those who embrace it free. The Truth of the gospel is not experienced by parroting "the sinner's prayer," or by signing some kind of promise card. Neither is it a matter of answering an altar call. All of those things are, at best, vehicles of expression. But the real Truth of the gospel is experienced when God, by

His sovereign grace, calls a person to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ -- in a revelatory way which changes that person's perspective forever. Before God reveals Jesus, a person may have no idea that there is deliverance and salvation. But after Jesus Christ is revealed, there is knowledge of a way out of this dead creation, and if they will yield by faith, an eternal sense of being loved by a heavenly Father.

Paul moves on to a third Truth in this passage. He says that within the gospel is "the righteousness of God revealed." How? "From faith to faith."

But what does that mean? It means that if I believe the good news of the gospel, all of the righteousness of God is revealed from the faith of Jesus Christ, to my faith. In effect, the righteousness of God is revealed, not only TO me, but IN me.

Here we see the Truth of justification by faith. Paul is telling us that if we believe and rest in what Christ has done, all of His righteousness becomes ours.

The fourth and final Truth of this passage is embodied in Paul's quote of the Old Testament. He says, "The just shall live by faith." Here Paul speaks of sanctification. He is telling us that, yes, all of the righteousness of God is revealed in us by faith. But then we must go on to LIVE by faith. What God puts in us by His grace will be made manifest in holy lives.

This is the gospel of grace. Paul and the other writers of the New Testament repeat this same message over and over again. It is the Truth which had come to grip their hearts.

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness
1:18 and unrighteousness of men, who hold the Truth in unrighteousness.**

It is important that we understand the context and proper meaning of verse 1:18, for it speaks of "the wrath of God." So often, the "wrath of God" has been portrayed as God's "revenge" upon sinners, or as His final venting of His pent-up anger against those who have sinned. Often we make the "wrath of of God" nothing more than an almighty version of the wrath of man. But that isn't what the Bible means by "the wrath of God." The wrath of God is NOT as the wrath of man. God's "wrath," as is the case with every aspect of His character, is actually LOVE. It's just that to those who have chosen to rebel, God's love must come to them in the form of chastisement and consequences.

God is love. And if God IS love, then love MUST motivate all He does, and all He is. Therefore, even God's wrath must be motivated by His eternal love.

We do not have a God who loves us only to a point -- that of our rebellion -- at which point He suddenly explodes in wrath and punishes us in a holy rage. No. We have a God who eternally loves us, seeks us out, and Who is ever working to turn us from our will to His will. But if we continue to resist His will, His working will be wrath to us, for it will conflict with us; will seek to chastise us into a condition of receptivity to Him.

Any loving parent knows that there are times when a child needs chastisement and discipline. Sometimes the parent must be extremely firm, even openly angry, at the child, so that the child learns the right way. This doesn't mean that the parent is venting wrath, or ever stops loving the child completely. No. It is BECAUSE the parent loves the child that "wrath" must now be displayed.

Human wrath is a personal, punitive, response towards someone, due to the fact that I have had my rights violated, or have had my sense of justice injured. It is usually born of personal pride, or of some other area of flawed, human, reasoning. But God is not subject to such weakness. He NEVER responds in a less than perfect way. And it is always with perfect love that He acts.

God never ceases to love even those who will spend all eternity separated from Him. The problem with those people is exactly that: God hasn't ceased loving them. Yet they continually refuse to turn. He has worked and worked to bring them to the place where they would receive His grace and love, but they would not. It is therefore only possible for Him to give them what they choose. In effect, no one who spends eternity away from God will do it because God wanted it to be so. He desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. They will spend eternity away from God because that's what they choose. Either they will reject God outright, or they will refuse to come to Him upon the only grounds they can come: Full surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Those who are ultimately judged worthy of eternal separation from God will prove their deserving of such a fate by insisting, right to the end, upon their rightness and God's unfairness. Their problem is not emotional, intellectual. It is not found in their upbringing, and certainly not in their works. Their problem is a moral one.

These are those whom Paul says, "Hold the Truth in unrighteousness." The word "hold" here means "to suppress" in the original Greek. But in order to "suppress" you have to KNOW. You have to make the conscious effort to imprison the Truth and refuse to let it out. Thus, these people are not those who have yet to hear the Truth. There is no ignorance here.

They have the Truth, but hold it back or suppress it.

How does someone do that? Well, it is an absolute principle of God: Either I will allow the Truth to conform me, or I will eventually conform the Truth. If I refuse to allow the Truth God reveals to adjust me to Jesus Christ, then I am going to adjust the Truth to suit my will. "My will" might even be quite religious. I may be a minister. Or perhaps someone who fancies himself as quite spiritual. But ultimately I must choose: Will I hold the Truth in unrighteousness, or will I allow the Truth to hold me?

That's the big question. There are many who KNOW Truth, that is, they KNOW what the Truth says. Perhaps they have even tasted of some of it's freedom. But the Truth has little or no access to them personally. They harden their hearts when God tries to invade them, slay them, and conform them to the Truth. Instead of allowing the Truth to hold and possess them, bringing them to an experience of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, they continue to hold the Truth in unrighteousness. They hold it "at arm's length," almost like a dead doctrine.

It is to these that the love of God eventually becomes as wrath. Everything God does will conflict with their will so that He might bring their will to a surrender. Eventually, God may even leave them alone; give them up to the thing they have chosen. But He does even that so that by tasting of the consequences of their choice they might turn. God is always redemptive in His workings.

**Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for
1:19 God has shown it unto them.**

Note that the knowledge of God has been made manifest IN those who "hold the Truth in unrighteousness." God has shown the Truth to them, but they have chosen something else instead.

Few people stare God straight in the face and tell Him they won't accept Him. No. What we do is side-step the issue altogether, and convince ourselves over a period of time that the choice was never there in the first place. But this is what it means to harden your heart. To "harden your heart" means to continually refuse or avoid the issue God has before you until nothing God does can any longer make an impression upon you. Your heart is like stone. It cannot be written upon by the hand of the Holy Spirit.

**For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are
1:20 clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His**

eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Nature itself bears witness to the glory of God. If we were the least bit sensitive, we would KNOW that the things we see must have unseen counterparts, indeed, an Almighty Creator.

Science has, of course, now come up with theories as to how the things which are seen can exist WITHOUT a Creator. We are provided with alternative explanations as to why things are the way they are. But God says we are without excuse for accepting such nonsense. God has put enough at our disposal that it should at least cause us to seek out the One behind it all.

1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.

Verses 1:21-22 aptly describe what happens to a person who attempts to find the meaning of life, or to solve its problems, without God at the center. It is morally impossible for a human being to function on any level of emotional or intellectual sanity if they are morally void of the fear of God. The BEGINNING of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, Psalms tells us. If a person, or society, does not have the fear of God as their motivation, then how can there be even the BEGINNING of wisdom in their thinking and reasoning? We see the fruits of this all around us today. No longer are there any absolutes. Moral values are considered an infringement upon the rights of the immoral. Soon it may be unconstitutional to possess a Bible because it "imposes" its values upon us, or because it "discriminates" against women, homosexuals, etc. All these things are symptoms of knowing there is a God, but refusing to honor Him as God.

Notice something here. None of these things are the result of GOD doing something to us. No. They are the result of us doing them to ourselves.

God, as verse 24 indicates, simply gives us up to our choice.

**Who changed the Truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served
1:25 the creature more than the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen.**

**For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections. For even the
1:26 women did change the natural used into that which is against nature.**

**And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman,
1:27 burned in their lust toward another. Men with men working that which
is unseemly. And receiving in themselves that recompense of their
error which was meet.**

God never holds us responsible for what we have not chosen. But He does hold us responsible for seeing the way of deliverance through Christ and then refusing. Thus, whether a person believes homosexuality is a choice or not, it leaves the path to deliverance as the only one acceptable to God. And as an aside, God would not describe homosexuality in the terms He uses here if it were something acquired by birth. It is clearly the result of a moral progression, even if chosen in ignorance.

**And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God
1:28 gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not
convenient.**

Convenient, here, means "that which is fitting." Once a person refuses to function as God intended, i.e., to God's glory, there can come only reprobation. It is a moral impossibility for a human being to refuse to retain God in his knowledge, and to have a sound mind at the same time.

Many people, especially non-Christians, scoff at the notion that they will suffer any harm for sin. But to them, "harm" often means "punishment" at the hand of God. And since that "punishment" is usually not immediately forthcoming when they sin, they believe there are no consequences to their actions. But God says that the consequences for sin go far beyond Him intervening and personally "punishing" someone. Sin kills -- not God. Sin destroys -- not God. Sin ruins, damages, and distorts the human personality -- not God. When we sin we are doing something terrible, not to God, but to ourselves. We are becoming something which is further and further away from what God intended a human being to be.

That's what Paul is getting at here in this verse. If I refuse to retain God in my knowledge, that is, refuse to live with His interests and glory in mind, then my mind will become reprobate. It will degenerate into something reflective of my moral choice to refuse God. As an example, if I choose to remain a homosexual, then I am going to receive "in myself that recompense" which my sin produces. (see 1:27) That is why many homosexuals have similar mannerisms. They are reflecting a consequence which has occurred in their being and human personality -- a consequence created by their own sin.

One of the worst penalties for sin is that I become less and less sensitive to it. I become more and more at home with it. Little by little my moral choices alter my character, personality, and my being. In time, I become so at one with the rebellion against God that I think I'm normal. I eventually lose all ability to discern right from wrong: A reprobate mind.

Note again a point vital to understand: There are consequences for sin which sin itself creates. God does not necessarily have to come down and punish or chastise someone for sin -- although He can, and at times, has done so. But sin itself kills. Sin itself does something inside of us which reflects the realm of death.

This must be so. Think about it for a moment. If the only consequence for sin was an intervening punishment by God, then sin really isn't so bad. I could sin continually and never realize any consequences unless God came down and punished me. That would mean that GOD, and not sin, brings death upon me when I sin. This makes God the author of death, and not sin. It makes sin a neutral thing -- resulting in no consequence whatsoever. And it makes God out to be -- not our Redeemer -- but nothing more than a heavenly referee, meting out punishment to us when we sin.

The fact is, most people, including most Christians, live under the power of exactly that error. We think that the wages of sin is "punishment from God." The Bible says that "the wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) It is sin which works death in us, not God's punishment FOR sin.

This is not to say that when a man sins that he is sinning against himself, rather than sinning against God. No. All sin is ultimately against God. And God will be the final judge to Whom we will answer. God will look at us with eternally discerning eyes and will call us exactly what we are. There is no escaping the fact that all people must answer to God. We must remember that sin ruins the one sinning because God made it to work that way. He built His justice into the fabric of our being. He created the abstract laws which rule His creation.

Thank God for redemption through Jesus Christ. Because Jesus

overcame all sin and death, Christians need to no longer live under the law of sin and death. When we sin, there is immediate redemption through faith in Christ. No one need continue living under the death and damage which sin brings. There is a victory in place for each of us.

1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers,

1:30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

1:31 Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

1:32 Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

These are the moral traits of those who have turned away from God. But notice again that these traits are not the product of ignorance. God says in verse 1:32, "Who, KNOWING the judgment of God..." Spiritual and moral reprobation never occurs because I have not known the Truth. It always occurs because there is Truth I have known, or could have known, but which I have refused. That refusal is a moral choice which reacts in my being and produces a distorted moral character.

The prime example of this is, of course, Lucifer. God never created Lucifer as an evil creature. Evil is never a creation of God. God creates all things good, for they are a product of His character. Rather, evil is always the product of God's good creation choosing to turn bad. Lucifer knew tremendous Truth. He was with God Himself. But He choose to be his own god. What Lucifer became because of his choice was not a punishment God put upon him. His twisted moral character is a reflection of the magnitude of the moral choice he made.

The same thing can be said of Adam. Adam was created good. But because he refused Truth he knew, he became something evil; something which merely shadows what God originally intended. God didn't do this to Adam. Adam did it to himself, by sinning against God.

Expanded Commentary on Romans 1:16-32

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed [it] unto them. (Rom. 1:18-19)

Romans 1 deals with individuals. It is always within individuals that the work of Satan -- or the life of Jesus Christ abides. The corporate church, and the corporate world, takes on the collective character of the individuals who comprise it. This is important to keep in mind as we read these sobering passages.

This passage defines for us the individuals about whom Paul is speaking. He says these individuals are those who, "suppress the Truth with unrighteousness" – that is the Greek reading. These are people who COULD know God – because there has been a revelation IN THEM of God. God has shown them the Truth. But they suppress it in themselves by choosing unrighteousness.

This is clearly another way of saying that such people have chosen darkness RATHER than light. They were given SOME light. But they chose darkness RATHER than light. That is the cause of their darkness WITHIN.

These are people who have received enough light and Truth to turn to Christ. They do not necessarily know much theology. But God, through His spirit, has convicted them, "of sin, righteousness, and judgment." (see John 16:8) But as we quoted from John 3, the reason why people refuse to come to Christ – come to the light – is because they refuse to be exposed as sinners. Thus, they suppress the Truth – they do not turn to Christ. Instead, they choose darkness rather than light.

Let's read on:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Deity; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:20-21)

Paul is not suggesting that the observation of the physical creation is enough to convert someone to Christ. No. In fact, Jesus said, "No one can come to me except the Father who sent me draw them." (John 6:44) So we are not left to ourselves to find God or make our way to God on the basis of our observation of nature. But what Paul is saying is that once God DOES begin to draw someone to Christ, then creation and conscience will serve as affirmations of the inner conviction of the spirit of God. They will know that they are accountable to God. Again, they will know enough to turn to God through Christ.

Note that Paul says, "they knew God." There was an inward conviction or realization of God – a beginning that enables them to turn to God through Christ by faith. But they either neglected to do so, or refused to do so. Instead, they forfeited the Truth God revealed to them.

Note the key: They KNEW. But they forfeited the Truth they KNEW – and instead chose unrighteousness. These are not folks who are ignorant. They are not innocent victims. They KNEW enough to at least turn to Christ.

Now, what happens to such a one who knows they are accountable to God, and COULD turn to Him – but does NOT? They become vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart is darkened. In other words, if I refuse light I get darkness. My spiritual condition is darkness. And what characterizes this condition of darkness is, "vain imaginations."

The Greek word for, "imaginations," really means, "reasoning," or, "thoughts." In other words, once I refuse light, my thinking will become governed by darkness – it will be void of Truth; void of light. My world will be fully within myself – outside of God – and I will be left to my own resources.

There are people who once professed Christ but who are now completely comfortable living in sin and unbelief. The problem here is not theology. The problem is that they have forfeited the light and chosen darkness. The darkness within them is what makes them comfortable in sin.

But that is actually the best case scenario. Because I cannot return to my previous condition of ignorance or neutrality, my refusal of God has started me on a decent unto reprobation. My thinking and moral perspective will no longer be governed by Jesus Christ. It will be governed by ME – and worse – I will now have given the enemy access. The enemy is never passive. He wants to kill, steal, and destroy.

What Happens in the Darkness

Every one of us is born in Adam as those blind to God. Even if we have theology we may remain spiritually blind to the Person of Christ. For this God does not blame us – He never blames us for being born in Adam. But we are

responsible for choosing to stay there – we are responsible for turning to Christ -- once God brings light. For it is one thing to be unable to see. But it is another, having seen enough to turn to God, to then willfully close my eyes. For if I do close my eyes, I am no longer blind. Rather, I am chosen a self-imposed darkness.

This brings us back to something that I said earlier: God never withdraws His light. He never withdraws Christ. But we can withdraw ourselves from HIM. In that case, we will receive within ourselves the darkness we have chosen – and within that darkness we will be both susceptible to our particular lusts of the flesh, and to the powers of that darkness. This will be a one way trip into reprobation and perversion if we do not turn and repent.

Paul describes people who have refused light and pushed away the Truth of God:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. (Rom. 1:22-23)

This description undoubtedly sounds as if it could not apply in this day and age. But it does. We must realize that Paul is illustrating a spiritual principle. “An image made like to corruptible man,” emerges when a person creates God in his OWN image. And it is a sure thing: If I refuse the revelation of Himself that God gives me, I will eventually create God in an image that satisfies myself.

This was stated earlier: Nothing is neutral. I am either allowing God to adjust me to Himself, or I am adjusting God to fit me. When I adjust God to fit me I am creating, “an image made like to corruptible man.” The result will be terrible deception, even if it is religious deception that is presented as Christianity.

Deception is certainly a condition where we profess to be wise, but are actually fools. The world today is infected with this deception. The church is likewise infected. But in the final analysis, it is the ONLY possible outcome of pushing aside the Truth of God in Jesus Christ.

Again – we are not reading a description of those who are innocently ignorant. Rather, we are reading a description of those who COULD know – of those who DO know enough to turn to God – but refuse. The impact is they become dark within. This is deception. And certainly one of the chief characteristics of deception is that we think that we are wise. But in reality, we are fools.

A Corrupt Mind

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all [men], as theirs also was. (II Tim. 3:1-9)

Those of whom Paul speaks in this passage are NOT heathen. They are supposed believers – they have, “a form of religion, but deny the power thereof.” They, “creep into houses,” which is a reference to the fact that church in those days was held in homes. But the pertinent point is that Paul says that they, “resist the Truth, are men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the faith.” Thus, these are people who were given light and Truth. But they are exactly as those described by Paul in Romans 1: They suppress the Truth within themselves – within their own unrighteousness.

The word translated CORRUPT in the NT means, “to bring into a worse state.” We could easily substitute the word DECAY. Just as living creatures and plants begin to decay once they are severed from life, so does the human mind and heart – so does the human being as a person – begin to decay and begin to become corrupt – once we are severed from LIFE HIMSELF. The impact is all the worse if we willfully choose to refuse Christ. In fact, there is a continual descent down into worse and worse states of corruption. This is what Paul describes here to Timothy, and it is what he describes in Romans 1.

You will note that here in II Timothy, as also we will see in Romans 1, that such people are, “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” In effect, they love themselves – they indulge themselves in their own lusts. It is as a law of the sin nature – if a person rejects God by choosing darkness they will be subject to their personal lusts; subject to the enemy. They will willfully give themselves over to their personal lusts. They may even do so while remaining religious – while being deceived into thinking they are walking with Christ. But all of this is evidence of a corrupt mind. It is evidence of a mind and heart that has become corrupted by its own unbelief to the point where they are utterly self-deceived.

Unfortunately, there is no depth to which humanity cannot sink. Humanity that is in the grips of the corrupt nature in Adam, and under the influence of the powers of darkness, is capable of the most evil imaginations and acts. We have

seen that this has been the case throughout human history. But we are now seeing a return of this evil in this day and age.

Sexual Immorality

...Became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened (Rom. 1:21)....Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.... (Rom.1:22)...Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. (Rom. 1:24)

It is here that we must repeat something stated earlier – for it is the underlying theme of Romans 1: If I choose darkness rather than light, God will give me up to that darkness and everything that goes with it. I will be given over to my personal lusts, and I will be susceptible to the powers in that darkness. I will reap what I have sowed – and God has warned us ahead of time.

Note the relationship between choosing darkness rather than light – resulting in a corrupt mind and darkened heart: This results in the judgment of God in giving such people up to the lusts of their own heart. This may not happen immediately. But it will happen – because it is the only condition into which a person can come once they have chosen darkness.

There are many possible, “lusts of the flesh.” But in Romans 1, the primary lust of those who reject God is sexual immorality. That is not the only consequence, of course, as we read at the end of Romans 1. But so often sexual immorality is involved.

We saw earlier that there is an amazing similarity in the many archeological discoveries of ancient civilizations. All of them worshipped false gods -- which were really, demons. There is also much evidence of sexual immorality. There is evidence of human sacrifice, including the sacrifice of children. Do we think that these horrible things are unrelated? No. They are evidence of the SAME evil having invaded these cultures and captivating those individuals.

This is Satan. But it is the unbelief of human beings, and the rejection of light, that gives Satan the power to govern them. In other words, human beings must provide the access to Satan by choosing darkness, but once they do, there is no restraint as to the evil possible.

There is no question that when individuals, and as a result, groups as a whole, choose darkness, that there are always innocent victims. Satan seeks to gain access to innocent people, especially children, through the unbelief and compromise of those who could turn to Him. Their blood is on the hands of those who were given some light.

Of course, in this day and age, despite what is happening before our eyes, people – including some Christian people – would mock at the suggestion that Satan could once again exercise such power in this world. But we are fools if we doubt this possibility. In fact, it is always a device of Satan to hide himself. Yet this is happening right now – on every level.

Paul is telling us that there will come a point where, if people knowingly push away God, that God is going to judge them by giving them up to the darkness – to the sin – that they have chosen.

Take note: There is such a thing as judgment wherein God gives a person over to sin. Because a person chooses the lusts of the flesh God may give them over to exactly what they have chosen. Those lusts of the flesh then come to dominate that person – dominate their thinking, degrading their mind, and pushing them into acting out their sin.

What this means is that much of the sin that we see today is the result of God's judgment along that line. Not in the sense that God makes anyone sin – of course not. But what we are seeing is NOT merely human sin for which God will later judge. Rather, the sin we see today IS the result of God giving people up TO their sin of unbelief. God has given people up to their sin – and the forces of darkness therein. That is what we see.

As we stated earlier, as the church and the world have forfeited the Truth through unbelief, the restraint upon the forces of evil has been removed. Satan is once again establishing sin, evil, and perversion as the NORM. This is the principle of Romans 1, and it can happen to a nation, a church, or a person. Again – if I push God out, Satan and the forces of evil will come in and fill the void. I will be given over to the darkness I have chosen and everything that comes with it. That will be a corrupt mind, sexual immorality – or whatever is my weakness – and the forces of darkness.

So, here we see what we might call another step downward into reprobation: Sexual immorality. So often – not always, but so often – those who abandon what they knew of God turn to sexual immorality. This is because sexual immorality is fundamental to Satan's desire to destroy what a human being IS. It is fundamental to human identity.

Homosexuality

Why do we suppose that homosexuality, same sex marriage, transgenderism, and even the indoctrination of young children with these perversions, have become such prominent issues over the last few years? Why have these perversions become normalized, and even celebrated? This is happening more and more, not only in the world, but in what used to be mainstream dominations of the church. What is happening?

Again – we have pushed out God. Thus, the forces of evil are no longer restrained, and Satan has infiltrated IN. And Satan has always had as his endgame the destruction of the purpose of God for humanity. Today, Satan continues his attempt to destroy humanity by corrupting the sexual nature of human beings – by destroying gender – by destroying what a human being IS. Homosexuality and transgenderism are his primary attempts.

These perversions are SIN. But they are the further results of the sin of unbelief – they are the results of God giving a person over to the darkness they have chosen. Of course, such a person will not believe that this is what has happened to them. That unawareness is part of their deception.

The Word of God is clear on this matter:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. (Rom. 1:25-27)

Many professing believers might think that such a judgment of God is harsh – that those who are given up to their lusts don't deserve it – that if they had known the consequences they would not have sinned. That is rubbish. We are reading these warnings from out of Romans. And if the church would preach the Truth of Jesus Christ, instead of trying to be politically correct, people would be faced with the Truth. It directly and clearly states that homosexuality is evil, and that these are going to be the consequences for choosing darkness rather than light. God is not unjust.

A, "vile," affection is a lust that, when practiced, dishonors a person's own body, and of course, dishonors God. But according to scripture, this dishonoring includes the fact that a person is doing damage to their own personhood. And isn't that true about sexual immorality? All sin does damage to the sinner, but sexual immorality does a greater damage. And homosexuality does the greatest damage of all to those who practice it, because it is contrary to God's design. In accordance to Satan's goals, homosexuality destroys what a human being is – it destroys gender.

In the passage above, Paul says:

Men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

Likewise, Paul writes:

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. (I Cor. 6:18)

Paul is telling us that it is possible to sin against your own body to the extent that within your own personhood you begin to reap what you have sown. He says this specifically with regards to fornication and homosexuality.

The Wages of Sin

And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Here we see sexual immorality is not the only result of unbelief – although you have to conclude from Paul’s emphasis upon it in this chapter that it is one of the worst. But the principle remains: If a person pushes out God – pushes out the Truth that will renew the mind – the result will be a reprobate mind. And with that, will come darkness and all that is in darkness. There will be deception that will justify even the most horrible sins. As noted earlier, this is not the result of a onetime sin. It is a result of continually pushing away God. And as is always the case, it is always possible to repent and turn to God. Indeed, it is the refusal to do that which is the cause of these conditions.

As horrible as all of this is – and as true as all of it is – we must remember the Truth that began this passage of Romans 1:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

God is just. He has made the Truth in Christ known to all who would turn and open their heart.

Romans

Chapter 2

Doers of the Law?

Beginning with chapter two, Paul begins to lay the foundation for the gospel of grace by showing the utter hopelessness of trying to live by the law as a means to salvation. This context is important to understand, for many of the scriptures in chapters two through five have been taken out of context to prove the opposite -- to prove that God expects us to try to live by the law. But no. God is showing us through these words that not only have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, but we will forever remain short of His glory unless we put aside our own works and believe and rest in the finished work of Christ.

- 2: 1 Therefore, thou are inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges, for wherein thou judges another, you condemn thyself, for thou that judges do the same things.**
- 2: 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to Truth against them which commit such things.**
- 2: 3 And think thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?**
- 2: 4 Or despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance?**
- 2: 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,**

In verses 2:1-4, Paul shows that death is the only possible fate -- not only for one who has sinned -- but also for those who would judge them. Paul tells us that the moment we judge others by any standard we condemn ourselves -- because it is certain that we too fall short of the standard.

It is important to note that Paul's admonition that we "judge not" is a secondary point in this passage. His primary point is show his readers that

all judgment must refer to some law, presumably God's law. But again, the moment we use God's law to judge another, we condemn ourselves, for all have fallen short of fulfilling His law.

Judging another is not the same as discerning the difference between right and wrong. God wants us to discern good and evil. He wants us to call things what they are. But He does not want us to judge. "Judge" -- in the wrong sense -- really means to "come against." It carries the sense of "passing sentence against someone." Godly discernment is a product of knowing Jesus Christ. It sides with the sinner against his sin. Judgment is a product of insisting on my personal justice -- due to the fact that I have not seen my own need for God's mercy.

Paul ends the passage by showing that it is the KINDNESS of God -- not His threat of punishment -- which leads us to real repentance. This is a departure from the motive many of us have had for repenting: Fear. Most of us change our ways because we are afraid of what we think will happen to us if we don't. We know little about forsaking sin because we have fallen in love with a God and Saviour whom we no longer want to violate.

Obedying God to avoid His so-called "punishment" is, at it's root, legalism. It may be an understandable motive, but is a self-centered motive. It is actually unbelief. If I obey God simply to avoid punishment, I may not have opened myself to receive His free gift at all. I may simply be doing whatever I have to do to survive. This naturally leads into the next passage (2:6-11), which shows the futility of standing on one's own works, rather than by faith upon the finished work of Christ.

- 2: 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds.**
- 2: 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality: Eternal life.**
- 2: 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey unrighteousness: Indignation and wrath.**
- 2: 9 Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of Jew first, and also of the Gentile.**
- 2:10 But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that works good, to Jew first, and also to the Gentile.**

2:11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

This passage has often been quoted to show that Christian works do figure into our eternal reward, or into our eternal destiny. After all, doesn't Paul say God is going to reward us according to our works? Doesn't he then list what those rewards are going to be? Verses 2:6-11 is vital to understand because a proper understanding lays the foundation for most of the rest of the book of Romans.

The key to this passage is to see that Paul is telling us the absolute Truth: We are going to be rewarded according to our works. There is no escape from this. But more importantly, we must understand WHY he is telling us this Truth. It is NOT to admonish us to do more and more good works, so that we might attain to the rewards mentioned. No. He tells us we are going to be rewarded according to our works so that we must begin to sense how empty and unrighteous our works really are. He wants us to see that if our destiny or reward hinges upon OUR works that we will have nothing. Our works cannot save us or earn us anything else from God.

When some Christians read a verse like 2:6, they think only of the good works and serving they are doing, and imagine how these might be "adding" to their eternal reward. But how many of us consider the works which might be SUBTRACTING from our reward? If we want to be rewarded according to OUR works, then we have to include ALL of our works in the equation -- not just the ones we are most proud of. We have to consider every thought, every word, every attitude, and every action we do which is less than perfect. All of these must subtract from our reward if we expect that our good works are going to add to it.

Now ask: Based on your works, how much of a reward do you think you are going to get? Are works which you know are not good enough to save you, nevertheless good enough to earn you a greater reward? -- or any reward at all for that matter? God gave His holy law for the expressed purpose of showing us the folly of such thinking. Once we are exposed to the law, we will see that our only hope is to be rewarded, not according to OUR works, but according to HIS finished work. This is possible only through faith. It is by faith that His works become our works, and therefore merit the full reward of God.

Verse 2:7 clearly shows Paul's real intention in the passage. Taken alone, out of context, it states that those who are patient in "well-doing," and who seek for glory, honor, and immortality, will be rewarded with eternal life. We would be hard-pressed to find a more blatant statement describing

"salvation by works," or "reward-earning by works." But this is exactly the opposite of what Paul is trying to teach us. Paul is merely showing us that yes, you can indeed earn your salvation; earn your reward. But only if you are able to live a perfectly sinless life. Only if you are able to discard the sin nature to the point where you are seeking for glory, honor, and immortality. Obviously, Paul knows no one can do anything of this things. He wants us to see this.

Jesus uses a similar technique in the gospels. He lays down impossible standards for His followers to meet. Then He tells them that their reward depends upon them meeting those standards. But in doing this, Jesus is really fulfilling the law to the full. He is allowing the law to bring His followers to a complete depletion of their own works. He wants them to see that, yes, these are the standards of God's righteousness. But they can't be met by doing good works. They are met only by faith -- by resting in HIS finished work.

This then, is the central theme of the book of Romans: The law is holy, just and good. Everything written in the law is the Truth. But the reason the law was given was not so we'd have a code to live by. The law was given to show us we are DEAD; to show us we can't live by God's standards. God gave His law as a schoolmaster to lead us to a total reliance upon Jesus Christ. By faith alone -- in HIS work -- do we stand.

2:12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.

Paul now elaborates on 2:6-11. Having stated that perfect justice demands that God must reward each person according to their deeds, and that God is never a respecter of persons, Paul now goes on to show the insignificance of our natural heritage. Even though he is writing to a mostly Gentile church, he goes to great length in the book of Romans to show that the Jews have no privilege over the Gentiles. Their only "advantage," if you will, is that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (3:1-2) Paul's purpose in proving this to the Gentiles is undoubtedly to assure them they are not in the slightest position of exclusion. They have all the access to God through Christ as do His "chosen nation."

The statement, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law," is clear confirmation of Paul's later claim that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." (3:20) In other words, the law doesn't create sin. If there were no law, I'd still perish in sin. The law identifies and defines the sin that

was already in the world long before the law. (see 5:13) The law merely gives us knowledge of what sin is by revealing to us a written version of the righteousness of God. That's why, if I lived my entire life without the law I would still perish in my sin. My sin would continue to be my death, even if I had no definition to put on it.

In contrast, "as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." This is inescapable. If I have been exposed to the law of God, my sin has been exposed. I have been, and am being, judged by it. Paul leaves no one with a means of escape. If I have never heard of the law of God, I'm going to perish in my sin without the law. But even if I have heard of it, indeed, been fully exposed to it, the law itself will bring me to the same place:

It will condemn me to death.

2:13 For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

This verse is often quoted to "prove" that Christians must be "doers" of the law, and not merely "hearers." But this is to take the verse out of context. It is agreed that Paul is stating an unalterable Truth: Only the doers of the law shall be justified. But his proclamation is not meant to get us to become "doers." It is intended to show us the futility of relying upon our "doing," for which of us can become justified through our "doing?"

Here again Paul continues to lay a foundation upon which He can share the true gospel. Again and again he tells us the Truth: The doers of the law shall be justified. God will render to every person according to their doing. But he is quietly waiting to "spring" on us the other side of this Truth: "By the deeds of the law there shall NO flesh be justified." (3:20) And, more importantly, "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (3:28)

Paul wants us to see that the law of God is perfect, as far as a written law goes. It exacts perfect justice. It never compromises with the righteousness and holiness of God. But God did not give us His law as a standard we must measure up to if we would be justified. He did not give it as a code to live by if we are to prove ourselves REAL Christians. He gave it to show us as dead sinners, thus pointing us to Jesus Christ as our only hope. Unless we grasp this Truth in the early portion of the book of Romans, we will never understand the book as a whole.

2:14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the

things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.

2:15 Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another,

2:16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Paul here alludes to the fact that the Gentiles, while not given the law, nevertheless do have a conscience. Man, by nature, is a moral creature. It is impossible for him to be otherwise. So even if I don't have a law to define sin and righteousness to me, I do have the sense of morality which God originally built into humanity. It is written "in my heart." My conscience, even if damaged and misinformed, does bear witness to some standard of right and wrong. To a degree that only God can judge, this make me accountable.

No person is born totally void of morality. We KNOW, to some degree, the difference between right and wrong. The trouble is, our sin nature makes it impossible for us to succeed in living up to our sense of right. Amazingly, this means that our conscience is like a "law unto us." Because it constantly convicts us as falling short of right, it acts like God's law in pointing us to "Someone outside of ourselves" as our only hope. Here we see the choice everyman has to make. If my heart constantly convicts me of falling short of right, I can choose to cry out for help, or I can choose to surrender to the wrong.

None of this yet introduces me to Jesus Christ. Only God can draw a person to Christ. No sense of morality or natural hunger for righteousness can do that. Unless God takes the initiative and plants into us the revelation of Christ, and the faith necessary to receive him, we could spend our lives lamenting that we fall short of doing right, yet we would still die in our sin. Deliverance from death into salvation takes a supernatural act from One who is outside of ourselves, but nevertheless loves us enough to take the initiative to save us. This is the gospel of grace.

2:17 Behold, thou are called a Jew, and rest in the law, and make thy boast of God.

- 2:18 And know His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law.**
- 2:19 And are confident that thou thyself are a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,**
- 2:20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the Truth in the law.**
- 2:21 Thou therefore which teach another, teach thou not thyself? Thou that preach a man should not steal, do thou steal?**
- 2:22 Thou that say a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? Thou that abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege?**
- 2:23 Thou that make thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonor thou God?**
- 2:24 "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you," as it is written,**

The Jews believed that they had exclusive access to God because of their natural birth. They thought the law made them special. But Paul intends to show them that their national birth, rather than give them special access, actually gives them special responsibility. In verses 2:17-24, Paul shows that their possession of the law means nothing. Whether they have obeyed it is what is important.

- 2:25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law. But if you be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.**
- 2:26 Therefore, if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?**
- 2:27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision do transgress the law?**

Paul will tell us in verses 2:28-29 that true circumcision is of the heart. This was a shocking statement to a Jew -- if not totally unacceptable. Circumcision was not some obscure OT ordinance. It was THE sign of the Old Covenant. The moment you state that circumcision avails nothing, you are saying the Old Covenant avails nothing. And if that is true, then it means nothing to be a Jew, rather than a Gentile.

Paul goes on in verse 2:26 to show that if a man actually did keep the whole law, then even if he were uncircumcised, his perfect law-keeping would qualify him as if he were circumcised. He would be as perfectly righteous as one who is circumcised claims to be righteous. "But then," Paul says in verse 2:27, "That creates another problem." If an uncircumcised man proves himself righteous through law-keeping, where does that leave those who are circumcised, but who transgress the law? It leaves them judged as dead sinners.

Paul's intent is to show that circumcision does not equal righteousness, or greater access to God. (see also Gal. 5:16; 6:15) This is an important Truth for Christians. It shows that there is nothing about me -- about what I am doing, the group I belong to, or the doctrines I believe in -- that makes me more righteous. No matter what "circumcision" I would like to claim as a sign of righteousness or exclusivity, it avails me nothing. I am righteous only through faith in Jesus Christ.

2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly. Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh.

2:29 But he is a Jew which is one inwardly. And circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

What a tough pill to swallow for the first century Jew! Being a "real Jew" has nothing to do with natural birth. It is spiritual; a matter of the heart. This teaching of Paul made him many enemies among even Jewish Christians. Paul's declaration that REAL circumcision is of the heart is reinforced in the book of Galatians:

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works in love. (Gal. 5:6)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor

uncircumcision, by a new creation. (Gal. 6:15)

Expanded Commentary on Romans 2:6 Rewarded According to Works

All of those who are in Christ are presently allowing – or not allowing -- God to build a dwelling place in them for Christ. We are doing that personally, but then by extension – by our communion with others in Christ – contributing to the building of a dwelling place for Christ in the body of Christ as a whole.

This ought not to be surprising, for Christianity at the core is, “Christ in you.” (Col. 1:27) Therefore, if I am truly born from above, Christ already dwells in me – I am joined to Him in spirit through resurrection union. Thus, when we speak of building a dwelling place for Christ, we are not talking about salvation – but we are talking about what happens AFTER salvation, and because of salvation. We are really talking about spiritual growth – we are talking about increasing the dwelling place for Christ in us. We are talking about our need to decrease in order that He might increase. We are talking about becoming a person in and through whom the Christ who dwells in us can live and move and be expressed.

This fact leads us to a phrase we find a number of times in scripture: “Rewarded according to works.” What works? And what reward? We are going to discover that the work is the dwelling place in each of us for Christ. And the reward is Christ Himself at one with us in that very same dwelling place.

This is actually going on right now, although the fullness of it will be released into the eternal ages. Right now we are a dwelling place for Christ. The purpose of God is that our capacity for Christ might be expanded – we must decrease that He might increase. To the extent that this happens, we will be able to more fully experience Christ, and be an expression and extension of Him. This can happen NOW. Thus, we do partake of what is called a “reward,” now – we can experience Christ now. But it is at the end of this age when Christ returns that there will be a full release of these realities. And Christ will dwell in and through us eternally. We will be, “rewarded” – the word is recompensed – for the WORK – the dwelling place we have built – by the eternal presence of Christ in that dwelling place. In short, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” will become, “Christ in you, the realization of His glory.”

The Work and the Recompense

In I Corinthians 3 Paul directly speaks to the idea of a reward as the outcome of ministry. But you will notice that he uses the term, “fellow laborers.” Here again we see that ministry is not only for Jesus’ sake – but within Jesus’ sake it is for others. God has chosen some to, “bear the heat of the day,” so that others may freely receive and share in what God has given them.

This does not eliminate personal responsibility. In fact, it is only if God is building a dwelling place for Christ in EACH that the body of a whole is benefited. Note verse 8 which reads, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." The point Paul is making, first of all, is that despite the fact that all in the Body are fellow-laborers, the reward of EACH is based on the, "labor," of EACH – it is based on the individual. There is no reward here by proxy.

The phrase, "rewarded according to our works," is repeated a few times in scripture. Most interpret this to mean that yes, we are saved, "by grace through faith," but we are rewarded according to our works. But does this make sense? Are we saved, "by grace through faith," only to live the Christian life – or perform Christian ministry -- on the basis of earning a reward based on works?

Does it make sense that Jesus would say, "Freely you have received, therefore free give" – to those who would minister – and then turn around and say that the same are going to be rewarded according to their works?

There are other questions about the common interpretation of, "rewarded according to our works." First of all, what works? Most limit this supposed reward to our good works, or to the good results of our ministry. But if we are going to be rewarded according to our works then ALL of our works must be taken into account – all of our outward works, inward works, thoughts, and attitudes – all of our faith and all of our unbelief. ALL of the impacts of our ministry, both good and bad, must be taken into account. ALL of this must be gathered up and tallied in order to determine the reward of each person.

So ask: If ALL of our works, and ALL of our ministry, both good and bad, are going to be taken into account to determine our reward, how much of a reward do we think we will merit?

There are some who would suggest that all of our bad works and bad ministry will be forgiven, but all of the good we have done will determine our reward. Ok, but then ask: How good is good enough?

As you can see, once we bring any part of the Christian life down to works – once we say that our eternal reward is going to be determined by our works – we are right back under the law. We may not be under the law as it pertains to salvation, but we are under the law as it pertains to our reward as saved people. And the Christian life that emerges will be essentially the SAME – that of trying to merit the things of God.

No. This cannot be. God has freely given us all things in Christ. We are to freely give all things freely to others. "Freely," means grace. It eliminates rewards as a motivation. It eliminates the fear of the loss of rewards. We are not only, "saved by grace through faith," but all that is of Christ is upon that same basis of GRACE.

Now, that being the case, we must still explain what God means when He says that His people will be, "rewarded according to works." We can begin to see the Truth on this matter by turning to our passage in I Corinthians 3.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For no other foundation can any man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are. (1 Cor. 3:10-17)

If we read this entire passage it becomes clear that what is being built is a dwelling place for Jesus Christ – that dwelling place is individual believers who collectively constitute the body of Christ. That is verified by Paul's conclusion that, "You are the temple of God."

Thus, "each person's work," is not what is done TO build this dwelling place, but rather, "each person's work," is the finished dwelling place. We use this kind of language all the time. If we stand in front of a building we have constructed, we will say, "This is my work." We are referring to the building, and not to the things done TO build it.

Paul is saying that the body of Christ is a living temple of God – a dwelling place for Jesus Christ. Each of us is building out of ourselves a dwelling place for Christ, and we are likewise – through our oneness with others and through our ministry – building the same in others. That is the work that will determine the reward.

But what we are building is going to be revealed as to its true nature by fire. If what we build consists of wood, hay, or stubble – that is, temporal and corruptible materials – it is all going to be burned out of existence. But if what we are building in ourselves and others consists of eternal materials – that which is of the life of Christ – then the fire will bring that out. It will be proven eternal.

How does the reward figure into this? Well, if we are going to be rewarded according to our work, and the work is the dwelling place for Christ, then the reward is the measure of Christ that can dwell within what we have built. Sure. The reward is ACCORDING TO our work.

What could be a greater reward than Christ Himself – eternal fellowship with Him? We are building a dwelling place for Him. Or to put it another way, we are right now building an eternal relationship with Him.

A Dwelling Place for Christ

Paul tells us, “let each man take heed HOW he builds.” So ask: How do we build a dwelling place for Jesus Christ?

The answer is simpler than we might expect. We build a dwelling place for Christ by abandoning ourselves to Him by faith -- for whatever it takes and for whatever He desires. This is an inward surrender before it is anything outward. And through ministry we help build a dwelling place for Christ in others by teaching this Truth and joining each other in Christ by faith.

We are already becoming a dwelling place for Jesus Christ – or we are not. To build a dwelling place for Christ, we must decrease – our old, “dwelling place,” must be torn down through the work of the Cross – so that He can increase in us. To the extent that we lose ourselves to Him we will experience Him as our life – and be for Him a dwelling place. And to the extent that we edify others in Christ we are building in them. This is about what Christ is becoming in a person.

The, “finished building” – one that will pass through into the eternal ages – is one that proclaims, “Yet not I, but Christ!” Clearly, this is NOT about how wonderful we are. Rather, it is about how wonderful He is – and whether we have unconditionally lost ourselves to Him.

Let’s gather this up: The temple, or dwelling place in each believer, is what is being built. Thus, the dwelling place that is being built determines the extent that eternal fellowship with Christ is possible. The eternal fellowship with Christ – the capacity to experience Christ Himself – IS the reward.

But Paul is also telling us that the true nature of what is being built is going to be tested by fire – and it will be revealed. If what has been built is merely religious and of natural man it will not be able to pass through the fire. Thus, there will be no dwelling place for Christ that remains. But if what is built is of Jesus Christ then the fire will prove it to be eternal.

We need not push off this testing by fire to the last judgment. Of course, that will be the ultimate. But this testing by fire is going on right now. Our faith and relationship with Christ is right now being proven – as is anything we have built into the lives of others. Trials will expose our spiritual life as being fake or as being real. The fire will expose what we have built in others as fake or as real.

God is always redemptive. Thus, if the fire shows our faith to be fake – if the fire exposes our lives to be built of religious materials -- confess it and begin to

allow God to build in us that which is eternal. For if the fire exposes that our life is built upon that which is merely religious, or built upon self interest, and we keep building back up what God wants to tear down, in the end we will own it. There will be no room in us for Christ. We might nevertheless be saved – as Paul says – but what a loss!

The Goal

The goal of the Christian life is to know and experience Christ, resulting in the glory of God being made manifest in and through us. The temple is what is being built – the temple is the work -- and the fullness of Christ that is able to dwell within that temple IS the reward that corresponds TO that work. To the degree that we become a dwelling place for God's will and glory – this will be the degree to which we will be able to experience Christ and experience all of the spiritual blessings that are found in Him. Thus, our reward is Christ Himself – and all that this means by extension.

Once we gain an understanding of some of these passages having to do with rewards we should realize that God does not keep score. He is not tallying our good works vs. our bad works. In fact, this isn't about what we DO at all – as far as serving, preaching, teaching, or any other performed works. Rather, it is about relationship with Christ. In the end, that is what is going to matter. What matters right now is our relationship with Christ in grace and Truth – in spirit and Truth – and whether we are being built into a temple in which Christ can dwell forever.

Expanded Commentary on Romans 2:25-29

Circumcision

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. (Gen 17:9-11)

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.....But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:1, 5)

Circumcision was the SIGN or TOKEN of the Old Covenant. You could not be under the Old Covenant unless you were circumcised. Indeed, circumcision was the sign that you were one of God's people. The women were considered to fall under the circumcision of their father, and then later, their husbands.

Circumcision was not optional under the Old Covenant. It was the doorway INTO the nation of Israel, and to the promises of God. In fact, if you were not naturally born of the race of Israel, but were circumcised – it would be as if you were an Israelite.

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. (Exo 12:48)

Again I say – because we must establish this – that circumcision was how you became one of God's people. Or, to put it another way, circumcision SET YOU APART and IDENTIFIED you as one who belonged to God. Because of this, it meant EVERYTHING.

Now, when we turn to the New Testament, we find Paul, a Jew, making an incredible statement. He says:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (Gal 5:2)

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love. (Gal 5:6)

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Gal 6:14-16)

Paul was, in these verses, completely invalidating circumcision for those in Christ. Now can we see why he aroused such anger from the Jews? Paul was essentially saying that the Jews were no longer the exclusive people of God – because the very sign that set them apart from others, and identified them as those that belonged to God, was no longer of any avail. He was really saying that the Old Covenant, which circumcision represented, was done away in Christ.

It is probably impossible for us today to grasp the magnitude of Paul's proclamation that circumcision meant NOTHING. On the one hand, it was a statement that represented a great freedom. But on the other, it completely destroyed the foundation of the religion that had been practiced by the Jews.

A New Testament Circumcision

Most all of those things God gave and commanded in the OT had New Testament counterparts. The OT was, "the shadow of things to come." The NT brought the reality of CHRIST IN US. The OT was all about Christ – but the New Testament WAS Christ Himself. Circumcision was one of those shadows that spoke of a greater reality.

Earlier I said that circumcision SET APART a person as one of God's people. It was essentially surgery that was performed, cutting off the foreskin, and marking that person forever as belonging to God. This not only ushered that person – normally 8 days old – officially into the nation of Israel, but it also put them under the law. Likewise, it entitled them to certain blessings and inheritance. Thus, circumcision was a visible sign in the flesh of a person that they were all of the above.

There is much said in the NT about circumcision. Of course, front and center is the fact that it means NOTHING as far as access to God, relationship with Christ, or salvation. But it did represent a great Truth that is found in Christ. Circumcision represented the CROSS of Jesus Christ – and the necessity of each believer coming TO it, and UNDER it, and THROUGH it.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the

***uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him,
having forgiven you all trespasses; (Col 2:10-13)***

The Bible reveals that Jesus did not merely deliver us from the penalty FOR sin. That is, of course, included in what He did. But more importantly, Jesus delivered us from SIN ITSELF. In fact, He delivered us, through His death on the Cross, from the old creation – from the Adam race. And through His resurrection, we are born again a NEW creature.

We see this, not only in the above passage, but through a number of parallels between circumcision and the Cross. First, circumcision was the, "cutting off," of the flesh. Indeed, God chose that particular part of the body for an important reason. Circumcision illustrated the Truth that, through the Cross, God cut off the Adam race completely. In the Cross of Jesus Christ, Adam, and everyone in Adam, dies. What better way to show the death of the entire Adam race than to figuratively CUT OFF that which procreates and continues that race?

God was illustrating that the human race had no ability to produce LIFE through pro-creation. Oh, we can birth other spiritually dead people. But we cannot produce those who are alive unto God. The Adam race is DEAD. But rather than think about this in terms of God condemning Adam, think about it in terms of God delivering us from the Adam race. In other words, God was delivering us from the utter futility of continuing a dead race. Rather, He made a NEW creature – a new kind of man in Christ.

Here we see the real meaning of the Cross. The Cross is the death of the Adamic race. Through the Cross, God has completely set aside, indeed, put to death, if you will, everything that belongs to that old creation. He has CUT IT OFF. The Adamic race ENDED at the Cross of Jesus. That is why He is called the Last Adam. After Him, there is NO more Adam – what we see since the Cross is nothing more than the working out of that through the impact of the Cross in the lives of people.

God says that believers are, "planted into Christ" – planted INTO His death – and also, "planted into Christ," unto newness of life through the resurrection. This tells us much. It means that, yes, Christ died FOR us – He tasted a death for us that we will never have to taste. But this was all so that we could die IN HIM and be raised IN HIM. You could not be set free from Adam or become a new creation if Christ simply did things FOR you. But He did all these things FOR YOU so that you could experience them IN HIM, and thus, received the impact IN YOU.

Through the Cross, God CUT OFF the Adam race, and if we come to the Cross, the Adam race is cut off from US. We are then SET APART for God – and become one of God's people – through the resurrection, in identification with Christ. Remember how circumcision set one apart as one of God's people? This

is exactly what the Cross makes possible. Indeed, only the Cross makes it possible.

Here we see the error of neglecting or denying the Cross. This would be worse than telling an Old Testament Jew that he did not have to be circumcised to become one of God's people. It would equal to saying that you can be IN ADAM, but IN CHRIST, at the same time. Make no question about it, if you don't enter into Christ through the Cross, you are NOT in Christ. You are NOT saved. This is just that important.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (I Cor. 1:18)

The Seed of Abraham

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou [art] cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:14-15)

These words of the Lord, after the sin of Adam, are addressed to the serpent, who was the instrument through which Satan had tempted Eve. It is the first promise of Redemption given in the Word of God.

The fact that this promise of Redemption is addressed to Satan shows that the real power behind the fallen Adam race is spiritual – Satan is the god of this world, that is, he is the god of this earthly, natural realm. His kingdom must be destroyed in order for humanity to be set free.

That being said, God promises a Redeemer Whom He refers to as, "the seed of the woman." This shows that right from the beginning that Redeemer would be, "the Word become flesh."

God follows up His promise of a Redeemer with judgment upon Adam and Eve for their sin. This judgment was gathered up in their eviction from the garden. They were no longer capable of living in the garden – because they were no longer in fellowship with God. God clothed them with the skins of an animal which required a blood sacrifice – showing that it would only be through the death of a substitute – the seed of the woman would be that substitute – that Redemption was possible.

So immediately after the sin of Adam – the sin that destroyed the Adam race – we find the promise of a Redeemer that would be born into the Adam race – the seed of the woman.

Of course, the full revelation of the Son of God become the Son of Man is not given at this point. But the seed of the woman would not be born OF the Adam

race. Rather, He would be born INTO the Adam race from the outside – God would be His Father.

Abraham

If we fast forward to Genesis 15, we find that the Truth of THE SEED is brought forward. God promises Abram a SEED – God promises Him a son:

In that same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "Unto thy seed have I given this land." (Genesis 15:18)

Now, what WAS that covenant? The Old Covenant was, first, God's promise to Abraham -- of a son. But through that son, God said:

I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curse thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

The words, "IN THEE (referring to the SEED that was IN Abram, but Who was yet to be born) shall all families of the earth be blessed," is a reference to the Redeemer. Here we see that, "the seed of Abraham," is more than just Isaac. Rather, it is the SAME SEED that God promised in the garden – it was the Redeemer Who would be the means by which ALL the world – not just Israel – would be blessed.

What is a SEED? A seed is that which comes from a living entity – but which is used to produce more living entities after the same kind. In a very real sense, a single seed contains all that will eventually come out from it. Thus, "the seed of the woman," Who is likewise, "the seed of Abraham," is One Who is born human – but is ONE Who carries within Himself all Redemption, and all of the fulfillment of God's purposes. He would also carry within Himself all who would be born of Him; of His life.

Note that the OLD Covenant was the promise, not primarily of a nation, but the promise of the SEED. The nation of Israel was birthed from out of Abraham to be a light to the nations – but a light that was to point to the Redeemer. The Old Covenant was ALWAYS Jesus Christ in type and shadow, and Israel was to be the means by which Christ was revealed to the rest of the world – at that time in type and shadow. That is why they received the promises and the Old Covenant. But they were to eventually be part of the New Covenant – which is Christ Himself in His people.

There is no need to insist upon the future of Israel according to the flesh. For it is certain that they must come to Christ in order to become the NEW Israel – in order to be engrafted into the purpose of God. And for those who do come to Christ:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:28-29)

Abraham's Seed is Christ

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He says not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (Gal. 3:16)

When God said to Abraham, "And in thy seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed," God was talking about Jesus Christ – not Isaac. Isaac would be the son of Abraham, but in Isaac would be Jesus Christ. HE was THE ONE SEED of Abraham, in and through Whom all of the nations of the world would be blessed.

Once we see that Christ is THE SEED, the NT teaching on this becomes clear. The teaching of the New Testament is that if you have your faith in Jesus Christ, you ARE a child of Abraham. You are a child of Abraham because, by faith, you are "in Christ" – who is THE SEED, or child, of Abraham.

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.....And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:7, 29)

So just as believers are sons and daughters of God IN THE SON – and ONLY in the Son – so are believers Abraham's seed IN THE SEED, who is Christ. All that the believer is, and all that the believer receives, is because we are IN HIM – joined to Him in resurrection union. That is a fact whether we are Jew or Gentile.

The Last Adam

In Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:22)

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45)

The Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us. He was born INTO this world – INTO the Adam race from the outside.

Do we realize that Jesus was born into the Adam race? There was no other order of humanity. The new creation began when He rose from the dead – not at His human birth. If we doubt this, we need only read 1 Cor. 15:45. Jesus is called THE LAST ADAM. He could not be called by that name unless He were born as the same order of humanity as was Adam created.

Now, of course, because God was His Father, and because He pre-existed, He did not inherit the sin nature. Jesus took upon Himself HUMAN NATURE – but not the sin nature that had corrupted human nature. He did not inherit the spiritual death that was upon the Adam race. Rather, He lived a sinless life to God's glory. In effect, Jesus became, "the Adam" – "Adam" means MAN – He became the MAN that God wanted. And once He glorified God fully as a human being – we see this on the Mt. of Transfiguration – there was no way to improve upon Him. There was no need for, "another Adam." In fact, there could NOT be another, for the rest of the Adam race was dead in sin. Thus, Jesus was THE LAST ADAM.

So we see that THE SEED of the woman; THE SEED of Abraham was The Son of God become The Last Adam. He was the fullness that God wanted in creating humanity.

But THE SEED was to redeem the rest of the Adam race. Thus, The Last Adam – on the Cross – bore in His body the entirety of the Adam race and DIED. That is the end of the Adam order of humanity – Jesus bore the rest of us and the Adam race thus ended in The Last Adam.

That is why Paul always emphasizes the fact that we are CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST; baptized INTO Christ; made one with Christ. Paul says:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (Rom 6:6-8)

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

It is without debate that Jesus Christ died FOR us. But it is because He died FOR us that our, "Adam man," died IN HIM. And that is the ONLY reason why it is possible to be free from the sin that is IN the Adam race.

Jesus Christ bore judgment for sin because He bore sin itself. And when He died, the, "body of sin," died in Him. When He was raised, He ushered in, not a fixed upon old creation, or a merely, "forgiven," old creation – but He ushered in a NEW creation. He ushered in an entirely new order of humanity – a humanity that is joined to the Lord; a humanity in which Christ Himself dwells.

The Defeat of the Enemy

We saw that God proclaimed the first promise of a Redeemer – who would be the SEED of the woman – God made that promise to humanity right in the face of the enemy. Hopefully, we can now see why – and hopefully we can see why the death and resurrection of Jesus defeated the enemy. If the Adam race died in Christ, and it is the Adam race over which Satan exercises his kingdom, then

Satan has NO KINGDOM. Thus, Jesus Christ has destroyed the works of the Devil at the very root – He has delivered believers out of the kingdom of darkness into HIMSELF. Satan is left without power over those who are in Christ.

God does not take those who are in Christ and apply to them what Jesus did through His redemption such that it is impossible for them to sin. No. We do continue to carry a sin nature. But the, "body of sin," has been rendered powerless – that is what the word translated, "destroyed," means in the NT Greek. Thus, to the extent that we abide in Christ and life in His life, Satan, and the sin nature has no power over us. That is a fact based upon the finished work of Christ.

All of this goes back to the promise of God of a SEED – the seed of the woman, and then the same SEED through Abraham – which is Christ. Jesus Christ is THE SEED of Abraham, and if we are IN HIM, then we are likewise the seed of Abraham – yet only through a spiritual union with Him.

Romans Chapter 3 The Righteousness of God Which is by Faith

Paul continues his argument to the effect that we are utterly hopeless if we rely upon our own works. Keeping the law cannot justify us. But in Christ, the Righteousness which is apart from the law is made manifest. By faith we are able to enter into His righteousness.

3: 1 What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?

3: 2 Much every way. Chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

The Jews were not chosen of God because of anything special or obedient about them. But because they were chosen of God, they were had a certain "advantage" -- that is -- they had been exposed to the Truth of His law and His ways. The Gentiles did not have this privilege until after Pentecost.

Along with this "advantage," however, the Jews carried a tremendous responsibility. They were to be the nation that would become the light for other nations. They were intended to be the people who would receive the Messiah. Of course none of this happened. The Jews failed to become the nation God wanted, and crucified the very Messiah for whom they waited.

3: 3 For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

3: 4 God forbid. Yes, let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written, "That thou might be justified in thy sayings and might overcome when thou art judged."

Verse 3:3 states a Truth which applies universally: Truth does not depend upon our faith. Faith believes Truth -- it never alters it. We cannot adjust Truth. We must allow Truth to adjust us. If no one ever believed that Jesus Christ is Savior, He would nevertheless be Savior. God is never moved by unfaithfulness of men.

Paul is telling us this to show us that the fact that the Jews rejected Christ

does not negate what God gave them, nor did it in any way defeat His plan. Christians need to listen to this. The fact that God chooses us for this or that ministry has nothing to do with our merits. It has to do with His purposes. But if we choose our purposes instead, God will bring to pass His purpose through someone else.

There are other applications for this scripture. There have always been many abuses by Christians of the things of God -- beginning with the Corinthian church. People have used the spiritual gifts of God -- not for the glory of God or the edification of the Body -- but for their own goals. Some have used the Truth itself to simply gain admiration and a following. Others have used it for financial gain. Still others have tried to pass a lie off as the Truth -- all in the name of Jesus. But despite all that men have done to bring reproach to the name of Christ, the Truth stands. God has never been moved from His purposes.

3: 5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.)

3: 6 God forbid. For then how shall God judge the world?

3: 7 For if the Truth of God has more abounded through my lie, unto His glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

Having just told us that our sin and our unfaithfulness serves to amplify the righteousness of God, Paul wants to assure us that this does not mean sin is good. No. Sin IS. God does not deny it's existence. It killed His Son. It is on this point that many Christians have misunderstood the ways of God. God always takes us, and works with us, right where we are. He does not ask us to be anything except what we are right now -- that is -- He doesn't tell us we must change or overcome before He will work with us. God puts His Spirit in us to change us. He doesn't mandate that we change before He will give us His Spirit.

One of the ways in which God works with us is to USE our sin, unbelief, and ignorance in a way that will bring us to the end of our own efforts. Often He will allow the natural consequences of our actions to come upon us in order to chastise us. Other times He will not. But in His wisdom God will use anything He desires to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

Notice: The fact God uses our sins and failures does not mean He

approves of them, or that they are His will. No. But again, sin IS. We are going to sin. God knows that. So He takes even our sin -- that which is wicked -- and works it to our good.

The unrighteousness of man is such a contrast to the righteousness of God that it actually amplifies it. It also shows our great need for Him. But this never means our unrighteousness is a good thing. It means it is an actual thing -- something from which Jesus has redeemed us.

3: 8 And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), "Let us do evil, that good may come?" Whose damnation is just.

Doing evil "that good might come" is, of course, nothing more than a excuse for sin. It is, in fact, license. But let's ask: Why would anyone accuse Paul of teaching that? Why would anyone accuse him of saying that sin is OK because of it amplifies the righteousness of God?

Let's probe into this: If Paul were teaching strict adherence to the law of God, how could anyone interpret that as license? They couldn't. If Paul were telling us that the OT law is binding, and that we must keep it if we are to be a Christian, then his words could never be construed to mean that sin is acceptable. But if he taught that we were freed from keeping the law, well then that's another story. If He taught that we are both saved and accepted by God totally by His grace -- regardless of works -- THEN he might be accused of teaching license by those who did not understand him.

Do you see this? Only a gospel of grace -- one which teaches that God forgives us and save us regardless of works -- can be misinterpreted as license. Only if Paul taught a gospel which accented faith rather than works could his words be twisted.

The accusation against Paul shows us as much about what he taught as does his teaching itself. No one teaching law-keeping is ever accused of license. But teach the gospel of grace and you will be accused of license. Jesus was. And so was Paul and the rest of the apostles.

3: 9 What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise. For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.

3:10 As it is written, "There is none righteous. No, not one.

3:11 There is none that understands. There is none that seeks after God.

3:12 They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable. There is none that does good. No, not one.

3:13 Their throat is an open sepulcher. With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips.

3:14 Whose mouth is full cursing and bitterness.

3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood.

3:16 Destruction and misery are in their ways.

3:17 And the way of peace have they not known.

3:18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Note verse 3:11. We are clearly told that NONE seek after God. This Truth verifies our need for God to initiate our salvation. Many of us have the mistaken notion that God gives us salvation because we are seeking Him, or because we have shown an interest in Him. But this is not true. No one is capable of seeking after God at all unless God first draws them to Christ by putting a measure of faith in their heart. God, and not us, is the one who initiates our salvation. This is grace.

But doesn't God save us because we believe? Doesn't He forgive us because we believe? Nope. We believe because God has chosen to save us. We believe because God has already forgiven us. There is simply nothing I can do, as a dead sinner, to initiate contact with God.

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw Him." (John 6:44) This proves the point. But we dare not take this too far and make it mean that we have no choice in the matter. God plants in me the measure of faith, and reveals to me His salvation and forgiveness. But I must believe and receive. If I won't, then it does not negate the fact that Jesus is Saviour, or that God has forgiven me through Him. But because I refuse, these realities will do me no good. They might as well be untrue because, by choice, I am walking away from them.

3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the

world may become guilty before God.

3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

To whom does Paul say the law is speaking? It speaks "to them who are under the law." (3:19) Ok. Now ask: Are Christians "under the law?" If we are, then the law is speaking to us. But if we are not, then the law can't be speaking to us. Right? Yep. That's what Paul says. Paul answers that question later in Romans. He says, "For you are NOT under the law, but under grace." (6:14)

The ramifications of this Truth are shocking for most Christians, for if the law is not speaking to us, then whatever it says does not apply to us. But what DOES the law say? Well, it establishes a standard of righteousness, and demands that we live up to it. If we don't, it condemns us as dead sinners.

That, in a nutshell, is what the law "says" to those who are under it. Thankfully, as those in Christ, we are not subject to any condemnation. (see Romans 8:1)

The big question, of course, is this: Does this mean we can break God's law? Does it mean we can sin that grace might abound? If, when reading the Truth about God's grace, and how it has freed us from the law, I still think that it opens the door to license, I can be sure that I have yet to truly grasp the Truth of grace. I can't have grasped it. I wouldn't be thinking that the only alternative to being "under the law" is license. I would know that anyone who is walking in the grace of God will want to obey God all the more -- in spirit and Truth -- because they love Him.

3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference,

Verse 3:21 is a verse most of us need to read over and over again. Note especially the phrase "the righteousness of God WITHOUT the law." Those who are in Christ are freed from the law. They are, in effect, WITHOUT the law. But does that mean those in Christ are encouraged to sin? No. We haven't had the UNrighteousness without the law manifested to us -- we've had the righteousness of God without the law revealed to us. He is a Person:

Jesus Christ. In Him we ARE righteous -- without the law. And in Him we live righteously -- without the law.

3:23 For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

3:24 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Verse 3:23 is the reason WHY there had to be a righteousness without -- or "apart from" -- the law: All have sinned and come short of the glory of God -- a fact constantly brought home by the law. As long as we are under the law we are defined as dead sinners. There must therefore be a salvation which both fulfills the intent of God law, and yet saves us out of our condition. This is justification by grace through faith.

3:25 Whom God has set forth to be propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

3:26 To declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.

3:27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.

"Boasting" -- that is -- taking spiritual security, or even pride, in our success at keeping the law and doing good works, is totally excluded as valid by FAITH. Why? Because faith does not point to what I do, but to what Jesus has done. Faith never holds up to God MY good works, or MY good intentions. It rests solely in the finished work of Christ, and knows that it is enough.

3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Note the word "conclude." This is Paul's CONCLUSION to all He has written. He could not have been plainer. A man is justified by faith "without" -- or "apart from" the works of the law. In other words, my stand before God, my access to God, and my entire relationship with Him, has absolutely NOTHING to do with MY works. I am justified simply by putting my faith in

HIM.

How many of us really believe this? When we pray, for example, do we feel that God is going to answer us based on our recent works? How about God's forgiveness? Do we believe that what we do determines whether God really forgives us, or determines whether we can appropriate His forgiveness? We must never examine our works to see if we can believe. We must believe, knowing that APART from our works, we have received all things freely in Christ.

This is the gospel of grace. It is likewise the greatest stumbling block for many Christians. That God justifies and fully accepts us totally APART from any works we have done, are doing, or will do, boggles our mind. We cannot grasp it. It violates our sense of justice, and confuses our concept of a wrathful, demanding God. Yet if we could truly see it, we would understand that this great Truth is the holiness, justice, and love of God, all wrapped up in a single sentence.

3:29 Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.

3:30 Seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.

Most first century Jews would have totally disagreed with these two verses. They would have said that God IS the God of the Jews only. They would have scoffed at the suggestion that God would justify any Gentile. This idea of exclusivity had become the heart and core of their religion.

Paul is again showing us that circumcision -- which stands for any religious distinction -- means nothing in the eyes of God. It is only through faith that we are justified. It is important to keep in mind that circumcision did not originate as a part of a man-made religion. No. God has ordained it, indeed, commanded it. But it was only a type. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in Truth. (John 4:24) No act of religion, no matter how pious, can substitute.

3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid. Yes, we establish the law.

Paul knows how easy it is for Christians to misunderstand the gospel of grace. He knows that the tendency is for us to reject the Truth because it

seems to do away with God's law, that is, justification APART from works seems to open the door for sin. Paul pictures us asking this question: Do we then make void the law of God through faith? His answer is clear: No. God forbid. Faith establishes God's law.

We must, however, stop right here and understand an important point. Verse 3:31 has always been a verse quoted by those who would put others under the law and hurt their freedom in Christ. They say, "See! If you have faith you must keep the law all the more. Faith establishes God's law to an even greater degree in our lives." The end result of such error is to create a Christianity made of legalism -- all in the name of the gospel of grace.

Paul will go on to explain what he means when he says that faith establishes the law of God, rather than makes it void. But let's anticipate him a bit. How could faith -- as the Bible (not man) defines it -- ESTABLISH the law, if we are justified by faith APART from the works of the law?

Faith establishes the law because it reveals that everything taught and demanded by the law is the Truth. Faith never does away with what the law commands. Indeed, it brings it to pass on a much higher level. We saw this earlier, on verses 2:6-13. There we saw that the "doers" of the law would be justified. But we also saw that no one can be a "doer." The law itself shows us as continually falling short of the glory of God. (3:23) This leaves us with the sole option of coming to God through faith in Christ. The purpose of the law is thereby fulfilled: It exposes us as dead sinners who need the free grace of God. Now ask: Does the fact that the law exposes us as sinners, unable to keep the law, make the law void? Does the fact that the law drives us to the grace of God mean what the law says is wrong? Or to put it more practically, does the fact that the law commands that we do the IMPOSSIBLE, and then condemns us for not doing it, mean that it is null and void? No. Quite the opposite. The law is telling us the whole Truth. We ARE dead sinners. We have no hope of keeping the law's commands. We are in desperate need of a Saviour. Our faith, therefore, rather than make all of these claims of the law void, prove them to be true. We can only believe in Christ as Saviour and receive His grace in the first place because we agree with what the law is saying to us about our need.

To summarize, the law is holy, just, and good. But we are not. Therefore, we must turn to faith in the only One who is holy, just, and good. In doing so we establish all of the law's commands and agree with them completely.

Expanded Commentary on Rom. 3:21-28

Justification By Faith

Let's look more closer at Paul's discussion in Romans 3 on JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. First, there's this term, "justification." What does that mean? It means, "to be declared right before God." Now, that of course is nothing more than saying that God declares you RIGHTEOUS. But what does, "righteous," or, "righteousness," mean? Well, "righteousness," in essence, means to not only be right BEFORE God -- in His eyes -- but righteousness really means to be right FOR God. It is one thing to be right BEFORE God, but it is another thing to be right FOR Him -- because if you're right FOR HIM, how many understand that you can live with Him and fellowship with him? So when God talks about righteousness, He is talking about being of a nature that is able to fellowship and live with Him. You're right FOR Him -- and justification is a declaration unto that end: You are justified, or made, or declared right FOR GOD -- and of course it is on the basis of Jesus Christ.

Now, therein of course, is where we have our doctrine of, "justification by faith." And what is the doctrine of justification by faith? Well, the doctrine of justification by faith states that if we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God IMPUTES to Christ all of OUR sin, and God imputes to us all of HIS righteousness. And there's an exchange there. And so is the imputation to the believer of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And Paul talks a lot about that and explains a lot of that in Romans. And as far as it goes, it is the truth. Justification by faith is a very true LEGAL explanation of how God is able to declare a sinner righteous because of Jesus Christ.

Now, you will notice that I use the term LEGAL. Paul works at explaining the redemption from a legal standpoint, because he needs to establish what God is doing as being moral, and legal. It helps us to understand what got accomplished through his Son through His death and resurrection.

So -- as I noted -- the doctrine of justification by faith -- wherein God IMPUTES to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is true from a LEGAL standpoint. But it does not go far enough. God does not merely IMPUTE to us LEGALLY the righteousness of His Son -- what God really does is IMPART to us Jesus Christ HIMSELF -- to live IN US, and to BE our life. How many see that THAT is true justification by faith? That's true righteousness.

I Corinthians 1:30 states that God has made Christ to be unto us righteousness. How many see that that's more than just having the righteousness of Jesus LEGALLY IMPUTED to you? No, Christ IS our righteousness. If Christ is in you, then you are righteous with HIS righteousness. Yes -- but more than that -- He IN YOU IS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now, I don't know about you, but that is an incredible blessing to realize that. To realize that this isn't simply a matter, so to speak, of God stamping you on the forehead with a big rubber stamp, "righteous" -- because of the death of Jesus. It isn't simply a matter of that. It is a matter of Christ in you who is the righteousness of God. And because He is, that's an eternal perfect righteousness -- with which you are one, because when you were saved, you were joined to the Lord and made one spirit with him. (I Cor. 6:17)

And so justification by faith is the IMPARTATION of Jesus Christ HIMSELF. We are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him, and He is our living, ever present, eternal, unchangeable righteousness -- completely independent of anything about US or anything that we do.

Righteousness Apart From Works

Now, Paul is going to say that here, starting in verse 21 -- and remember, in Romans, Paul does initially -- at least until he gets over the chapter 6, 7, and 8 -- work at the redemption in legal terms. But the truth, in principle, is here, as far as, "Christ in us," starting in verse 21. He says there, "But NOW the righteousness of God, completely apart from law-keeping" -- keeping with the picture, there, in the Greek, is a picture of a CHASM apart -- and so what he is saying here is that, "the righteousness of God, completely apart from -- completely dependent of any law keeping -- is manifested, and it's witnessed" - in type and shadow, as I said, in the old covenant -- "by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ" - because that's how we abide in Christ as our righteousness -- "unto all, upon all them that believe. For there is no difference -- ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

And so again we need to nail this and get it firmly established in our thinking and understanding: That if Jesus Christ dwells in you and I, and we are joined and made one spirit with Him -- if we are saved -- and if we are saved He DOES he does dwell in us -- if that's the case, HE IS the righteousness of God in us. He is our righteousness -- and Christ as our righteousness is absolutely independent of any law keeping or lack thereof on our part. In other words, if we keep all the laws in the world, it does not add to Christ as our righteousness. If we break every law under the sun, it does not subtract from the fact that Jesus Christ is our righteousness. We do not pop in and out of Christ if we are saved. We do not, through the works of the law, either enhance or subtract from Christ as our righteousness. He is not dependent upon us to be our righteousness; He is that regardless -- because He's in us by grace.

We have got to understand this -- that it all comes back to Jesus Christ IN US. Now, what we need to do, it states in verse 22: We need to abide in Him by faith as the only righteousness of God that there is -- the only righteousness

of God we will ever have. We need to believe and trust and depend on him as that. Now, if we don't, He is still our righteousness – it's just that it is not going to do us any good. Like Paul says in Galatians 5, I believe: "Christ is of no effect to you who would be under the law." And the Galatians were saved. He didn't say Christ walked away from them, or even that they walked away from Christ. No. They were standing aloof from Him. Christ was in them, but their faith was not in Him as their righteousness. It was in their works.

The Law Exposes

And so this is a foundational Truth about the righteousness of God that is in Jesus Christ. If Christ is in you, He is the only righteousness that you will ever have, or that you will ever need. We need to see that Truth. Now, we are NOT going to see it unless our UNrighteousness is exposed -- or unless our self righteousness is exposed. Now, a lot of people don't realize that self righteousness is SIN. Self righteousness is unbelief. Self-righteousness, therefore, ironically IS Unrighteousness. And the law of God, if we are open and true to God -- as much as know to be -- will expose all of this about us when it's true.

Now that exposure may take years, but God who promises us that he'll lead us into the truth, will lead us to THIS Truth. And that is what the purpose of the law on the Old Covenant was -- and despite the fact that were not under the law or under the Old Covenant, how many understand that the law nevertheless still does do that job today? If you're somebody that has tried to make your self righteous through law keeping you may very well -- and I hope you have -- discovered how unrighteous you are. Because the more you try to keep the law, the more ultimately the law will show you how unable you are to keep even the smallest point. But if that's happening -- rejoice -- because it's all unto the intention that you fall to your knees before Jesus as your righteousness.

So, in other words, if you gather all this up from verse 19, all the way through verse 24, what Paul is saying is that the law of God is there -- and what it speaks it speaks, "that every mouth might be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God." Because by the law comes the exposure of me as a sinner, and I'm left, if I'm seeing the Truth that the law speaks – I'm left without any hope if I were to look to myself.

Now if that were the end of the story it would leave us all nowhere. We would be hopeless creations. And, of course, many supposed Christians feel that way. We feel like we are hopeless, and have no hope. But despite the fact that we are going to see our lost condition, and will, at times, feel a despair and a hopelessness -- that should not govern us -- because side by side with any conviction like that that God brings is going to be a hope in One who is other than ourselves: Jesus Christ.

And so we see that very often if we are LIVING in despair, it's because we haven't yet seen Christ. It is because we are not believing the way we should. And we need to seek God further for the Truth that sets us free from all of that.

All Unto Grace

Now it takes years for most of us to straighten all this stuff out in our thinking because we were so preoccupied with ourselves. For example -- this goes hand-in-hand with what Paul says the law will do -- it's been my observation that for those who are under the law, usually there are two kinds of professing Christians that emerge from being under the law. And both, of course, are in error. The first kind is a Pharisee. These are the folks who try law-keeping to make themselves righteous, and they think that they have done it. The other kind are people who try to use law-keeping to make themselves righteous, and they are forever frustrated because they don't believe that they have done it. Now, what is the solution to that? Better law? No. The solution is to come into an inward realization of Jesus Christ -- the solution Paul gave in Galatians 4:19.

The whole purpose of the law was given and intended by God to bring man to an end of his own self; to bring man to an end of trying to make himself right for God. You get under the law, and even today, the law stands there and is doing this work. As soon as you approach what Paul calls, "a holy, just, and good," law -- as soon as you approach a law like that -- you're going to be proven to be unholy, unjust, and bad. And that's not a lie is it? The law will speak the Truth about you -- so that you will see that your only hope is to turn to Jesus Christ by grace through faith. This is the outcome that God intended for the law.

In fact, there is a bit of a type and shadow, even in that. You remember how John the Baptist, who was the last and the greatest prophet of the Old Covenant -- he was that -- he was as, "A voice crying in the wilderness -- to pave the way -- to prepare the way for the Lord." How many understand that this is exactly what Paul says the law was intended to do in each human heart? Paul says, in Galatians, "The law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ." How? By making us righteous enough for Christ? No. By showing us we can never be. By getting us on our knees and saying to God, "By thy grace oh Lord!" The law was a schoolmaster. John paved the way -- the Old Covenant can be said to have been that which paved the way for Jesus Christ the Savior. Again, NOT by making people righteous enough for God. No. The law exposed us as lost and unrighteous so that by faith we would come and receive Jesus Christ.

And so all this in verse 19 through 24 -- as I noted -- you gather it up: The law is going to speak the Truth -- that you and I have no hope in ourselves --

none whatsoever. The law is going to expose us dead sinners. But then he says there is a righteousness of God -- a Person named Jesus Christ -- Who is apart from law keeping; a righteousness that God gives us by grace in Jesus Christ -- a righteousness that in no way, shape, or form, is based on our works -- really a righteousness that is in no way based on anything about US.

You know, the Bible teaches that we are given the grace of God in Jesus Christ -- we are given Christ Himself -- fully independent of any works, or anything about US. But then we're told once that's established that then the result; the fruit -- will be works. By grace, through faith, unto good works. (see Eph. 2:8-10) That's the Truth. Disturb that order, and get it wrong, and you will be under ANOTHER GOSPEL. Now, this righteousness that is a Person dwelling in you and I -- Who we abide in by faith -- it is witness to buy the law and the prophets -- and like I said, it's in there in type and shadow -- it is the righteousness of God which is by our faith in the Person who is the righteousness of God -- unto all and upon them believe.

So there you have in Romans 3 a tremendous description by the apostle Paul of the intent of God's law. Isn't it amazing how so many Christian people continue to think that the purpose of God's law was to give us a standard of holiness to live up to? I mean, the law is called, "holy, just, and good." Here we are reading that the law IS holy, just, and good, but because it is, it's going to expose us as being anything but -- so that by grace through faith..." But the key here is to understand that if Christ is in us and we are losing our life into His hands -- such that HE becomes our life -- then IN that Christ the righteousness of God will be made manifest in us and through us. It takes work; it takes a lifetime. But our righteousness IS Christ. It is just that simple, and it is no more complicated than that. But if we try to get a righteousness some other way, then we are, in fact, under a law, and we are in unbelief, and we are in error -- because there is no such thing.

Romans

Chapter 4

That It Might Be by Grace

The story of Abraham's faith dominates this chapter. Paul takes pains to show that God reckoned to Abraham His righteousness BEFORE he did any works -- even before he was circumcised. His point is to prove that FAITH, and not works, is the key ingredient. God justifies the sinner, not because the sinner starts keeping the law, but because the sinner rests, by faith, in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

4: 1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, has found?

4: 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he has whereof to glory, but not before God.

Abraham could not glory before God even if his works were so perfect they could justify him -- as the law would define it. Why? Because doing perfect works makes no one to BE perfect. In other words, all the perfect works in the world cannot undo what the sin of Adam has done. Even those perfect works will be exposed as filthy rags in the light of the righteousness of God Himself. Man needs to be born again. He cannot duplicate the new birth with good works.

Here we see the distinction between "acts of righteousness" and "being righteous" -- and likewise a distinction between what we might term "acts of sin," and the "sin nature." Jesus explained this distinction several times. He said, "That which is born of flesh IS flesh, and that which is born of Spirit IS Spirit." The flesh -- and more specifically, religious flesh -- can produce some impressive good works, but if they are born "of flesh" they ARE flesh. They are NOT of God's Spirit, no matter how holy, religious, or pious they appear. Only works birthed from the new creation in Christ are of the Spirit: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit...Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them." (Matt. 7:18, 20)

4: 3 For what says the scripture? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to Him for righteousness."

This OT verse is embodied the gospel of grace long before Jesus was born. But do we know what God means by this verse? Is God saying that Abraham's act of faith was such an act of righteousness that God was able to declare him righteous -- as if Abraham's faith made him righteous? We need to get this straight because some of us mistakenly think that it is our faith in Christ which makes us righteous before God. It does not. Our faith in Christ simply believes and rests in HIS righteousness. Through faith, the righteousness of Christ becomes ours.

Faith is the eternal medium whereby that which is OUTSIDE of us might be conveyed to us. Note that. Faith creates nothing. It creates nothing in us, or in God. Our faith merely opens the door so that the object of our faith might bestow upon us what He desires.

There are many other ways to express this Truth:

God does not forgive us if we believe. We believe because He has already forgiven us.

Our faith does not save us. Jesus saves us. Our faith merely believes it.

Our faith does not make us righteous. Our faith believes in, rests in, and receives the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Faith never creates God's will, or changes God's will. Faith believes and surrenders to God's will.

By faith I receive what God has already given.

Man can do nothing to make himself righteous. No work can make him righteous, nor can any act of faith. Jesus Christ has already done everything there is to do to make us righteousness. God simply says we must believe it -- or, if we understood the real meaning of faith -- God says we must unconditionally EMBRACE what He has freely given.

Paul makes it a point to show that God declaration of Abraham as righteous was not based on any good work -- although Abraham did plenty of good works. God declaration was based solely on the fact that Abraham believed Him. Abraham was not declared righteous because he gave God the faith He wanted. He was declared righteous because he embraced what God wanted to give him.

4: 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

**4: 5 But to him that worketh not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly,
his faith is counted for righteousness.**

Paul draws a clear distinction here between the lie of legalism and the Truth of grace. He tells us that if a man's reward is dependent upon his works, then it has nothing to do with grace. In that case, Paul says, God OWES that man what he has earned, and it is, in fact, a debt God is obligated to pay him. Furthermore, that man has a right to "glory" in what he has done -- as mentioned in verse 4:2. But no. "To him that worketh not" for his standing before God, trusting in Christ, his faith -- not his works -- is what is reckoned to him as righteousness.

Notice Paul's clear teaching: If justification -- or anything else -- were possible through our works, then we don't need God's grace. In that case, God OWES us a reward. But justification is not possible through our own works. The only way for a person to be justified is by trusting, not in his own works, but in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Then the righteousness of Christ become imputed to us as it was to Abraham.

4: 6 Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputs righteousness without works,

4: 7 Saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

4: 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

It is always remarkable how God applies the Old Testament to the New. At times, He seems to take verses completely out of context. Here, Paul uses this passage as a part of his argument that God justifies us by faith apart from works. It is not an application we would likely make if we had no knowledge of grace. That's why it takes the Holy Spirit to show us what the Bible means by what it says, and how to apply it.

4: 9 Comes this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham

for righteousness.

4:10 How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

For the Jew of Paul's time, circumcision was the difference between being one of God's chosen people or a heathen. If you were circumcised, you were "in." If you weren't, you were "out." Therefore Paul uses this key issue of circumcision to prove his point of justification by faith APART from works. He asks whether Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness BEFORE or AFTER God circumcised him. The answer, of course, is that God justified Abraham BEFORE he was circumcised. This proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that circumcision means nothing. It had nothing to do with God reckoning Abraham as righteous.

It is so important to understand what Paul is saying. He is not telling us that circumcision made it possible for God to impute righteousness to Abraham. No. Rather, his point is exactly the opposite: Circumcision was the result of, or the sign of, the fact that God had already imputed righteousness to Abraham. The spiritual type for us is vital to see: We are not righteous before God because of anything we do, or because of anything we are. What we do and what we are are the results of God's righteousness being imputed to us through faith in Christ. Simply put, our works cannot make us righteous. But the righteousness which comes apart from works will produce works as a by-product.

4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised.

Again Paul says that circumcision was a "seal" or "sign" of the righteousness imputed to Abraham. It came AFTER he believed God, not BEFORE. This means that Abraham is the father of all who believe, whether they are circumcised or not.

The implications of this Truth are staggering, and quite freeing. It means

that there is no religious "sign" God looks for in us before He will impute to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no work we can do, attitude we can have, or church we need to belong to. He says that there is only one way to become righteous: Walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham. Believe and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. The works and Godly attitudes of heart will be the product OF that faith, not the qualifying signs FOR it.

4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

4:14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect,

The whole goal of the Christian is to be a fellow-heir with Jesus Christ. Everything else falls under that heading. This promise, to be a fellow-heir, finds its root in the promise God made to Abraham. Yet this passage makes it plain that no part of this promise came through the law. (4:13) In fact, if keeping the law could result in my becoming a fellow-heir with Christ, then faith is void. There would be no need for a promise, for I could EARN what God has promised through my works.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of GRACE. Through Christ, God has FREELY given us ALL THINGS. (see Rom. 8:32-33) The only alternative to God FREELY giving us ALL things would be a law by which I could earn all or part of them. There is no middle ground. But God says no. All things are freely given. I can become a fellow-heir with Christ through faith -- and only through faith. No law-keeping can birth me into the kingdom of God.

4:15 Because the law works wrath, for where there is no law, there is no transgression.

4:16 Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

The promise of righteousness cannot be through the law because the law cannot make anyone righteous. The human race is DEAD. Law-keeping cannot make it alive. The law can only define sin and point out transgression

-- thus showing all as sinners worthy of wrath. It is therefore only by faith -- not in ourselves, but in Christ -- that we can receive the promise.

Notice Paul's words: "That it might be by grace..." When a promise is "by grace," it means that it is a free, unconditional gift. There are no qualifications needed to receive. All one must do is believe the promise. That makes the promise sure, as Paul says, not only to those who are still "of the law," -- if they will turn and believe -- but likewise to all who believe as Abraham believed.

Religious man has for centuries been trying to qualify FOR the promise. We have believed that the promises of God are conditional. But God says we don't need to qualify for it. We can't. We need only believe and receive it. That is what faith is all about. It is so simple that we are blind to it.

4:17 As it is written, "I have made thee a father of many nations," before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickens the dead, and called those things which be not as though they were.

4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken: "So shall thy seed be."

4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.

4:21 And being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Christians need to get it settled once and for all: Our faith does not save us. Jesus Christ saves us. Our faith believes it and receives it. This Truth puts all of the initiative upon God, and credits Him with the glory He deserves, rather than give us any credit for even so much as believing.

God's miracle with Abraham is a type of His miracle with us. Just as Abraham had no hope of fathering a child, so we have no hope of giving

birth to anything spiritual. But God takes the initiative and calls into existence that which did not exist. In Abraham's case, God gave him the ability to bear a son. In our case, He takes the initiative to reveal to us His Son, and implants in us the faith necessary to receive eternal life.

Doesn't it seem strange that Paul would say that Abraham "staggered not" at God's promise? After all, didn't Abraham take matters into his own hands and give birth to Ishmael? Didn't he lie, telling the heathen king that Sarah was his sister -- because he was trying to protect the one God had promised would bear him a son? Does that sound like strong faith?

Actually, none of those things were indicative of weak faith. None of them were symptoms of a staggering or wavering faith. Why? Didn't Abraham do wrong when he gave birth to Ishmael, and when he lied about Sarah? Yes. He did wrong. But his sin was not that he doubted God. No. Rather, Abraham doubted his INTERPRETATION of God. Get that. It is vital to see the distinction. Abraham never once doubted that God was faithful. He never once doubted that God would bring to pass what He had promised. But over the course of time and events, he began to wonder whether he had accurately understood what God originally promised. When so much time had passed, and the silence of God had become deafening, Abraham began to say to himself, "Well, I thought God meant that Sarah would bear me a son. But I guess He really meant that I could have a son this other way, through my wife's hand-maiden. That will aptly fulfill God's promise. Yes...that is what God must have meant because there is no sign that Sarah will ever bear children again."

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever thought you knew what God had promised, only to later wonder whether you had properly understood it? The thing that compounds this dilemma is the possibility that we may have indeed misunderstood the Lord. Probably all of us have, at one time or another, jumped to wrong conclusions about what the Lord has spoken to us, and have had to face the disappointment of finding it out later. So what are we supposed to do in these cases? How can we know whether we have properly interpreted God's word to us? How can we be sure that we are properly interpreting Him? The experience of Abraham provides us with the answer for either situation.

Ask: What does the Bible say Abraham did in response to God's promise -- originally. It says, "Abraham believed God." Believed who? Believed GOD. Not, "Abraham believed God's promise." Do you see the difference? It is one thing to believe a promise and put your trust in it, and another to believe and trust in the One making the promise. If I trust in a

promise, it necessitates that I understand the promise and interpret it correctly. But if I trust in the Person making the promise, then it is only necessary HE understands the promise. In short, true faith doesn't need to understand. It needs only to trust the One who does.

It may be shocking for some Christians to hear this, but it is a fact: More often than not, God does not expect us to be able to fully, if at all, understand His words and promises to us. He knows that when He originally speaks a word to us that we do not have the ears to hear that we will have later. Indeed, even if we, as did Abraham, do understand what God is saying, we will have little idea of what it is going to take to bring us into the necessary spiritual condition to receive the fulfillment of the promise. Our understanding of what He is saying is therefore NOT God's primary concern. Our trust of HIM is.

We see this clearly with Abraham. He made every possible mistake with regards to God's promise to him. He tried to protect it, bring it to pass, even perpetuate it as God's promise once Ishmael was born. But all through that, Abraham believed God. He never once doubted God's faithfulness.

This is what we need to do. Whether we think we understand what God has promised, or whether we are in the dark as to what He means, we can nevertheless hold loosely to our interpretation of God, and hold firmly to God Himself. We can stop relying upon our understanding of God, and trust that God understands us. That is faith. It is faith in God -- despite all of our inabilities and immaturity.

God let Abraham go right ahead and make all of his mistakes. He did not come down and prevent Abraham's mistakes, nor did He appear to him and give him the "proper interpretation" of His promises so that Abraham could avoid the mistakes. Why? Because those mistakes were the only way Abraham could grow to be spiritually fit for God's original intention.

Abraham believed God, but was human. He was flesh. That flesh had to be de-throned. That meant exposing it for what it was through mistakes and consequences. So God stepped back and let Abraham make them. Once all of Abraham's fleshly efforts were exhausted, God was standing there waiting for him. God then said, "Now that you are depleted of your own efforts, I will do what I promised to do right from the beginning."

Isn't it wonderful that God is not moved from his faithfulness towards us despite all of our mistakes? Nothing Abraham did moved God from His original intention. And through it all Abraham believed God. In the end, Abraham says that his faith in God was right after all. God did bring to pass His promise in ways Abraham was originally unable to grasp.

We may not understand God. We may or may not correctly understand what His promises mean for us. But we can always by-pass our lack of understanding and believe God Himself. We can be assured it is sufficient that we trust the One who does understand.

4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him,

4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,

4:25 Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.

In verse twenty-five, the phrase, "raised again for our justification," should read, "raised again because of our justification." This is an important point. Christ could not have been RAISED "for" our justification because His DEATH had already justified us. And His death had already taken place by the time He was raised. He was raised "because" of the justification His death won.

Note again another great Truth in verse 4:25. Jesus Christ died for OUR offenses, and was raised because of OUR justification. It was all for US. He did not die because of God's need for appeasement, and neither was raised for that reason. The Truth of the gospel is that God sent His only Son to deliver us back to Himself, because He loves us -- not because He needed appeasement.

Romans

Chapter 5

While We Were Yet Sinners

Christ forgave us while we were yet sinners -- that is -- BEFORE we believed or obeyed God in the slightest degree. But now that He has forgiven us, and has revealed this Truth to us, we are able to believe, receive, be saved, and then obey. That is the Truth of grace. Paul goes on in this chapter to contrast Christ, the Last Adam, to the first Adam. Just as through the first Adam all were born dead, so in Christ are all born again unto newness of life.

5: 1 Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

5: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Verse 5:2 provides us with two important Truths about the gospel of grace. First, we have "access by faith into this grace." This echoes Ephesians 2:8 which says, "By grace you are saved through faith." In other words, our faith does not save us. God's grace does. But it is by faith that we receive what God has freely given. Faith in Christ is our access, or doorway, to the things of God. Secondly, we are told that we "stand" in grace. This hints at the Truth that God's work through Christ is finished. It is already there for us. It is immovable. We need only believe and stand in it by faith. This is in contrast to what many of us have believed -- that God's grace fluctuates back and forth, based on our works. But there could be no "standing" in a grace like that. It would move, depending upon what we do.

We have to shed the notion that what we do determines God's grace. We cannot move the grace of God even if we refuse to believe. The grace of God is always there, available for us. It is WE who move when we won't believe and stand in the eternal reality which God has provided in Christ.

5: 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works patience,

5: 4 And patience, experience, and experience, hope.

5: 5 And hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.

Here is given a progression of spiritual growth. First is tribulation. There is no growth without it. Tribulation works "patience." This Greek word means to "abide under." It is only if we "abide under" the trial -- rather than escape it -- that the trial can do its work. This is why God will often refuse to deliver us from a trial. Patience works "experience." This word would be better translated "proof of genuineness." It is by "abiding under" a trial that the life which God has put in us is made manifest -- or, we might say, shown to be genuine and real. The end result of these steps is said to be "hope." Hope is the certainty of what God has given and promised. If we abide in a trial, allowing God to do His work through it, we will come to see that everything God has said is true IS true. We will not be disappointed.

Paul interjects this passage into his arguments about justification through faith because he wants to show us that it is through trials that God proves all of these things true. If we believe and stand in Christ, despite all the lies and contradictions which come against the Truth, we will not be ashamed. We will see that what we believed without seeing is as true as God in heaven.

5: 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

5: 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

5: 8 But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Verse 5:8 leaves no doubt about who initiates reconciliation between God and fallen man: God does. God forgives us while we are YET sinners -- not after we repent, believe, or show some interest in salvation. Man has no ability to initiate contact with God. "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him," Jesus said. (Jn. 6:44) Even a man's initial interest in Christ is the result of God's free gift of grace.

Paul leads us into this remarkable Truth by showing us that rarely would anyone give his life for even a righteous man. But Christ died for the ungodly. God loves man so much that despite man's total rebellion and indifference towards Him, He gave His only Son.

5: 9 Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

It is curious how many times Paul uses the term "wrath" without the suffix "of God." Why? Well, if Paul used that term here, he would be saying that God saves us through Christ from His own wrath. This would be quite contradictory, although millions of Christians believe just that. Many of us actually believe that God offers us His free gift of salvation through Christ because He loves us, yet turns right around and tells us that if we won't receive Christ He will pour out His wrath upon us and send us to hell. Such a concept of God is a distortion of the worst kind.

So what is the answer? Isn't hell the only alternative to receiving Christ? Eternal death is the only alternative to the eternal life which God offers through the only Saviour Jesus Christ. But if a man refuses Christ, God does not need to punish him by pronouncing upon him the sentence of eternal death. Man is already dead without Christ. A refusal of Christ results in God simply judging the man worthy of his choice to remain that way forever.

"Wrath" is nothing more than the end-result of a man refusing life. It is the eternal fruition what Adam chose in the garden, and that from which Jesus saves us. "Wrath" is never the result of God's rejection of a man. It is the result of man's rejection of God.

5:10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Many of us have assumed that God saves us because we believe in Christ. But this is not so. We have assumed that God forgives us because we believe in Christ. But again, this is not true. God has won our salvation and has already forgiven us whether we believe or not. Of course, this does not mean we have no need for faith. To the contrary, if we don't believe the Truth, it will mean nothing to us. Faith is the only means by which we can receive what God has done.

Paul clearly shows this to be so. God reconciles us to Himself, not once we believe, not once we are "friends," but while we are still His enemies. He took the initiative and fully won our salvation and fully forgave all of our sin. Now, when God reveals this to us through Christ, it is our responsibility to simply believe it.

This verse also draws a distinction between the death of Christ and His resurrection. The death of Christ removed all sin and therefore reconciled us back to God. But His resurrection is actually what saves us. Without the resurrection we would be freed from former sin. But we would have no new life. It is our resurrection in Christ that is the new birth, and therefore, our salvation.

This verse likewise proves conclusively that the death of Christ could not -- in any way -- have been an appeasement of God. Why? Because the idea of appeasement says that God condemned us to death for sin, only to lift that death from us because Christ died. But notice: That makes us saved by His death. Romans 5:10 says this is not possible.

We are saved by His life because the death of Christ did not cause God to lift death from us. No. We MUST die. Our old creation MUST be destroyed. It is -- by being planted into the death of Christ. But at that point, we are not yet saved. We are dead. It is only by being raised in Him that we are partakers of His eternal life.

5:11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

The word "atonement" here, means "change." It denotes a change from enmity to friendship. In other words, through Christ there occurs a change, not in God, but in man. Man is reconciled back to God, and is now able to be at one with Him.

5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all that have sinned.

There are several key Truths revealed in this verse. Most importantly, we are told that "sin entered into the world, and death by sin." How did DEATH enter the world? By sin. Most of us have believed that death entered the world, not by sin, but through God's punishment upon Adam FOR sin. There is a big difference between the two -- a difference we must see if we are to understand the Redemption. Death is NOT God's punishment upon man for sin. It is the result of sin itself. In other words, sin kills. It is God who redeems FROM the death sin brings.

When God warned Adam against eating of the forbidden tree, He said, "In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17) He did not say, "In the day you eat thereof, I will punish you with death." Can you see the

difference? Suppose I put a glass of deadly poison on a table and said to you, "In the day you drink this poison, I will punish you with death." Would that make sense? No. The poison would kill you. No punishment would be necessary. But if I said, "In the day you drink this poison, you will surely die," then you would understand. The poison is deadly. It will kill you. Because I care for you, I'm telling you the Truth about it.

God's words to Adam, as well as many other scriptures, prove that death is the result of sin -- of man's refusal of the only source of life: God. It is the wage of sin, not God's "punishment" for it. (see Rom. 6:23)

The fact that death is the result of sin, rather than a punishment FOR sin at the hand of God, does not negate the fact that all sin is against God Himself. Sin results in death because God built into man a living justice: A man cannot sin against God and live. This living justice is evidence of the original relationship which existed between God and the first Adam.

5:13 For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no law.

5:14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come.

Having told us that "death has passed unto all men, because all men have sinned," Paul now tells us that this was so even before the law had been given. His point is that the law DEFINES sin -- it does not put sin there. A dead sinner in need of redemption is a dead sinner whether or not the law is there or not to define him as such. Thus, Paul can say, "Death reigned from Adam to Moses," even though the law was not given until Moses.

Notice what else this means: It means that the law of God is NOT what brings death upon us. No. Sin kills. The law simply defines us as dead. Death could not have reigned from Adam to Moses if the law brings death upon us. There was no written law from Adam to Moses. Yet death reigned, totally and completely.

Death is the result of sin. The law was given to define sin, and to show us our death. It was a schoolmaster, intended to lead us to the One who saves us apart from our works.

The phrase, "them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" is a reference to the fact that Adam's sin was THE original sin, that is, his sin was made from a position of perfect fellowship with God,

without the encumbrance of the fallen nature, and with the full knowledge of what he was doing. Our sins are not from that position. We are born as dead sinners. Adam was not. Adam, along with Eve, were the only human beings who ever sinned from a position of life.

5:15 But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one, many be dead, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many.

This verse begins a seven-fold comparison of the first Adam with Jesus Christ, the Last Adam -- although several of the verses make the comparison by saying that the two cannot be compared. The message is that despite the terrible scope and wide-spread ramifications of the death of man, the life Jesus won far exceeds it.

In this verse notice again that death is not portrayed as the "punishment" of an angry God against Adam, but something which came upon Adam "through the offense." This is brought out even more clearly by comparing the death which came through Adam to the life which comes through Christ. Christ had to WIN a victory over death in order that life through Him could be freely given. If death were a punishment from God, then Christ's victory over it would have been a victory over what His Father had imposed upon man. But this is impossible. Christ's victory was over that which Adam, through his own choice, had brought upon himself, and upon all who would be born of him.

5:16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift, for the judgment was by One to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification.

This verse is translated rather awkwardly. It is saying that God's grace is not to be compared to the sin of Adam, as to its scope or effect. God's free gift unto justification far exceeds any possible earthly comparison.

5:17 For if, by one man's offense, death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ.

Notice the contrast between "death reigned by one," and "shall reign in

life by One." To "reign" means to rule over. Death has literally ruled over mankind, controlling all the we are. But in Christ, we shall reign in life. Few of us have any point of reference for what that really means. We are so used to the death side of things we think it's normal. It has yet to enter into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.

5:18 Therefore, as by the offense of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification.

Christ died to justify God's forgiveness for our sins. He died because God had already forgiven us while we were yet sinners. But notice: This does not mean God leaves us in our sin, merely pronouncing us "forgiven." No. By definition, God's forgiveness includes His provision for deliverance from sin. Indeed, I cannot receive the forgiveness of God for sin, with true faith, unless I also embrace His deliverance from sin. Anything else allows sin to reign, all the while pronouncing it "forgiven."

Thus we see the nature of the free gift of which Paul speaks. The free gift of God is NOT a lifting of punishment for sin. It is not mere "forgiveness" for sin -- as we often think of it. No. The free gift is DELIVERANCE from sin. It is absolute freedom from it. God cannot "forgive" sin but provide no deliverance. That would be approval of sin.

5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.

Here we see that sin is more than "acts" which transgress the law. Sin is a nature; a heredity into which we are born through Adam. "Many were MADE sinners" through Adam's sin.

God does not hold us responsible for what we are in Adam. We did not choose to be born with a sin nature. But He does hold us responsible for what we do with the old nature. Because the obedience of One is able to make us righteous, we are responsible once we see the way out of sin in Jesus Christ. At that point we are no longer ignorant.

This is the importance of faith. Man cannot deliver himself. That's not his fault. But he can believe and rest in the One who has delivered him. No obedience can make us alive. But faith in Him -- the One who did obey -- will result in His life being imparted to us.

5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

The law defines and points out sin. Therefore when the law of God enters the picture, sin is exposed more and more. It is shown to abound. But, God tells us, that is only to show us our need for the grace of God. It abounds all the more over the sin which the law exposes.

The folly of trying to keep the law is shown here. The law is impossible to keep. God never gave it for us to try to keep. He gave it to expose us as dead sinners. But as it does expose us, are we going to kid ourselves that all we need to do is try harder to keep it? No. We should allow the law to bring us to the place where we stop relying upon our own works. We should allow it to lead us to a faith and rest in HIS finished work.

5:21 That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace even reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The free gift of grace -- the real thing -- does not result in license. It reigns through righteousness, that is, it results in a life which reflects the grace of God. Any other result is not the result of real grace. It is the result of a substitute born out of the unbelief of men.

Section 3

Expanded Commentary of Romans 6-8

Chapter 6

Romans 6

Foundations of the Redemption

In order to get our setting for Romans six, we simply need to read the last verse of Romans five. Of course we understand that there are no chapter divisions in Paul's original letter or in the original manuscripts. So this is all one continuous, unbroken thought in his mind.

In Romans 5:21, Paul continues his contrast which he began in chapter five, between the first Adam and Jesus Christ, the Last Adam. He says:

That as sin has reigned unto death [through Adam, as he mentioned earlier] even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

So Paul is giving us this contrast between the two men: The first Adam and the Last Adam. He is giving us the contrast between two lives -- the old life in Adam and the new life in Jesus Christ. He says that the race of the first Adam, and the old life of that Adam race, sin reigned and held everyone captive -- sin reigned unto death. But in contrast, in Christ, grace reigns through righteousness.

The Truth behind Paul's words is that there is no sin ever committed by the human race that was not dealt with by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no sin that is possible for a human being to commit where grace does not abound all the more.

Now, there is an exception to this that I do need to point out. I don't want to get into too deeply into it because it is not our subject matter. But there is one sin Jesus did not die for -- and there is one sin for which grace cannot abound. That is the sin of refusing the death of Jesus. Jesus did not die for the refusal of His death. God does not forgive the refusal of His forgiveness. Grace does not abound for the sin of refusing His grace. Can we see why this is the case? Well, if God did forgive the refusal of His forgiveness, and if Jesus did die for the sin of refusing His death, then it would negate the Redemption. For you could refuse Christ and receive Him at the same time. So that stipulation and qualification needs to be stated.

But that fact aside, it is nevertheless a fact that sin reigned all through the Adam race, but through Christ and Christ alone, grace reigned and abounded all the more.

Now it is that thought from Romans 5:21 that leads us into Romans 6:1:

What shall we say then...

In other words, having stated that sin reigned over the Adam race, but that grace abounded all the more in Christ, Paul asks, on the basis of that Truth:

What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin because grace abounds?

Of course, the answer is NO. But wait. Why is Paul asking this question? Clearly, because if the grace of God always abounds despite our sin then there will be those who conclude that we are free TO SIN precisely BECAUSE grace abounds. That is what Paul was accused of teaching – and it has been the accusation of legalists ever since against the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus.

Paul has already gone to great length in prior chapters to show us that the answer to sin is NOT to be under the law. But if we are not to be under the law, and grace abounds when we sin, then what is the answer?

When Does Grace Abound?

The answer is that those who are born from above in Christ are DEAD to sin but ALIVE to God – through Jesus Christ. But Paul will bring this out in a moment. But before we see this, let's discuss further Paul's question, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin because grace abounds?" Let's ask: Does God's grace abound EVEN when we sin? Or, does God's grace abound EXCEPT when we sin? It has to be one or the other.

Well, if God's grace abounds EXCEPT when we sin then His grace really doesn't abound at all, does it? For it is when we sin that we need the grace of God to abound most of all! Indeed, if God's grace abounds EXCEPT when we sin then it means that it abounds only when we obey, which puts believers right back under the law -- needing to maintain God's grace by our works. No, God's grace abounds EVEN when we sin. As he stated in Romans 5 – EVEN if sin reigns, God's grace abounds all the more.

Indeed, it is because grace always abounds EVEN when we sin that Paul is able to ask this question to begin with, "Shall we continue in sin because grace might abound?" It is clearly a rhetorical question that is based upon the Truth that God's grace always abounds EVEN when we sin. Sure. He is, in effect asking, "I have already stated that God's grace abounds even though sin might reign. But does this mean that we can continue in sin precisely BECAUSE grace abounds EVEN when we sin?" In effect, Paul is asking whether grace gives us license to sin.

Dead to Sin But Alive to God

God's grace abounds even when we sin. That is foundational gospel Truth. But having established that, and asked his rhetorical question, Paul is going to

state, in verse 2, as to why we will not, “continue in sin even though grace abounds.” He says, “God forbid that we would.” But then he says why we won’t:

How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?

Now, that is an answer that probably most of us would have given – certainly not in the beginning of our Christian experience. Most of us have not been taught this Truth; most of us are blind to it. If we were asked, “Why don’t we continue in sin even though we know grace abounds if we do sin? – most of us would probably say that we need to obey God and avoid sin in order to be blessed of God and avoid His displeasure.

That is probably the most common motivation that believers have – spoken or unspoken – for obeying God. But in our ignorance, we are actually denying that grace abounds even when we sin. Do we realize that? We are saying that obeying God brings His blessing – God’s grace abounds for us in that case – but disobedience incurs His displeasure or even His wrath – which would mean that His grace ceases to abound for us. In short, we are under the law – we are saying that God’s grace for us is determined, not by Christ, but by our works.

Yet this brings us right back to Paul’s question. He states: God’s grace ALWAYS abounds – EVEN when we sin. But, that being the case, then why not continue in sin because it is so – why not continue in sin because God’s grace always abounds?

As we have already quoted, Paul answers with another rhetorical question:

How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?

Note that: Those who are IN CHRIST are dead to sin. That is why we cannot continue in sin because grace abounds. That is why we cannot, as those in Christ, live in sin. Believers are DEAD to sin -- but ALIVE to God in Christ. Thus, we cannot be ALIVE to sin -- but DEAD to Christ.

Paul is, of course, speaking in the ultimate sense. He is talking about the NEW CREATION. In Romans 7 he will bring in all of the possibilities of failure, unbelief, sin, and struggles. But none of that – and this too is the Truth of both Romans 6 through Romans 8 – changes the fact that if we are IN CHRIST then by nature we are, “dead to sin, but alive to God.” Our conduct does nothing to alter that. We are in Christ regardless, by His grace, through our union with Him in His death and resurrection. That is finished – but the Christian life is a matter of discovering and experience Jesus Christ and coming into the fullness of Him and what He has done.

A Christian is one who is DEAD to sin – DEAD to Adam – but alive to God through Jesus Christ. This is the result of being IN CHRIST – it is the result of CHRIST IN US. It is not religious. It is reality.

In Him

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection. (Rom. 6:3-5)

In this passage we discover a great Truth. We discover that ALL that God has for the human race is given IN and experience IN His Son. Now, note that carefully. It isn't that God has merely given us THINGS because of what Jesus has done. No. God has given us CHRIST HIMSELF in whom are ALL THINGS. That is an absolutely essential Truth that we must realize.

In this passage this Truth is brought out several times. Note the wording: INTO Jesus Christ; INTO His death; buried WITH Him; planted TOGETHER into HIS death, and so on. We might add a few other scriptures:

I am crucified WITH Christ. (Gal. 2:20)

If anyone is IN CHRIST they are a new creature. (II Cor. 5:17)

He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (II Cor. 6:17)

All that God has for the believer is IN CHRIST, and thus, it is only by experiencing Christ Himself that the believer can experience all that God has given IN HIM. There is NOTHING God has given that is outside of, aside from, or in addition to, His Son. Jesus Christ IS all.

All of this goes back to the very core of Christianity: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) Or, if you prefer, the believer IN CHRIST. Christ is in the believer by virtue of the fact that the believer is, “joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him.” And if Christ is in us, all of the other Truth becomes possible to experience by experiencing Christ Himself.

We must see that the saved individual is joined to the Lord in resurrection union. Our spiritual oneness with Christ in that union is WHY we are saved. He is THE LIFE, and when we were saved, we relinquished our life by being baptized into His death, and were raised in Him – He became OUR LIFE. (Col. 3:4) Thus, we see that even eternal life is not a THING God gives us. No. He gives us Christ – He joins us to the One who IS the resurrection and the life – and He becomes OUR resurrection and OUR life.

We receive in Christ in fullness at salvation. There is NOTHING left over that we have yet to receive – for He is ALL. If you are joined to the Lord in spirit, you cannot have part of Christ. You are joined to all of Him – that is what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit – you are immersed in Him; joined to Him in spirit. That is a settled reality. Jesus made that possible through His redemptive work. But, once we are saved, we only begin to discover the Christ with whom we are now joined in spirit. The Christian life from that point is a matter of discovering and experiencing the Christ that we have received in fullness. It is a finished work – but then the reality of our coming into that finished work.

“So, how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” The answer is, if we are truly converted, we are not going to want to. We are going to be dying to sin because we are dead to sin, and we are going to be living unto God, because we are alive in Him. Despite all of the challenges, that will be the direction of our lives.

Baptized INTO Christ

Paul then asks, in verse 3, “Don’t you know that so many of us that were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” How many see that this baptism is a spiritual baptism? It is the spiritual joining to the Lord -- as noted in II Cor. 6:17. It is how we come to be IN CHRIST; how Christ comes to be IN US. It is not the baptism in water that people practice as an outward testimony. No, this is the inward reality that happens when we are born again.

Every place in the New Testament, and I can’t think of any where that this is not the case, where we find the command to, “be baptized in the name of Jesus,” the Greek, reads, “be baptized INTO the name of Jesus Christ,” or, “UPON the name of Jesus Christ.” This is the very same spiritual baptism into Christ so that we may be joined to Him in spirit. We are also told that, “We are baptized by one spirit into one body.” Whose body is it? It is the Body of Christ.

Baptism denotes IMMERSION. It denotes a becoming ONE with. As we have been seeing, this is much more than simply being handed THINGS or RESULTS because of what Jesus accomplished. Rather, it speaks of being spiritually joined to Christ Himself – such that we must experience all that He has accomplished by experiencing HIM.

Jesus Christ died FOR us as our substitute. He died a death that we never have to die. But He did die for us so that we could die IN HIM and be RAISED. A total immersion into Christ is a union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Our death and resurrection in Him is a once-for-all finished reality. But it is dynamic and progressive in the sense that as we experience Christ we will discover and experience the once-for-all finished reality of death

and resurrection in Him. In other words, all that He is, and all that He has done, will have impacts upon us. Our death and resurrection in Him will become realized as we realize HIM.

This is the real meaning of baptism – of being baptized into Christ. We are buried with Him by being baptized into HIS DEATH – by being united with Him in His death. His death becomes OUR death legally, but His death begins to work in us – such that we become dead to sin. And His life works in us such that we are alive to God. It is not a passive or merely legal matter. It is a dynamic reality to be experienced in Christ.

Planted in Christ

Paul next reiterates the fact that IF we are buried with Christ that we will THEN be raised up in Him:

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.

All through these passages we see that resurrection in Christ is dependent upon death in Christ. You cannot be raised in Christ unless you have died in Him.

The most obvious Truth here is that when we come to Christ we must take our place in His death. We must LOSE our lives to Him. This will obviously take a lifetime to deepen and live out – but the commitment must be made. If nothing else, we can ask God to do whatever is necessary to bring us into the fullness of Christ in His death and resurrection – and relinquish ourselves to Him. This is something we will WANT to do if we have seen our lost condition and want Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a continual experience of being crucified with Christ. It isn't that we die in Christ over and over again – but rather, we come into a greater awareness and experience of our once-for-all fellowship with Him in His death. Likewise, alongside of and emerging from this, is a continual experience and release of Christ in His resurrection. That is what he is getting at here when he says, "We have been planted together in the likeness of His death and shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." This is for now.

These words, "planted together," in the New Testament Greek, mean, "to cause to grow together." They describe an "engrafting" – which is just another way of saying that we are joined to the Lord and made one with Him in spirit. We are planted INTO Christ and His death – which severs us from the Adam life – but planted INTO Christ as our life – which makes us a new creation in Him.

Dead to the Old

Starting in verse six, we are going to read about how all of this results in freedom from sin:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, (and there it is again, WITH HIM) that the body of sin might be destroyed.

Let us note several essential Truths in this verse. First of all, does it sound as if God does nothing more through the death and resurrection of Christ than to fix up or repair the old man of sin? Is that what happens when we are crucified with Him? Does God repair us? Does He take the person we are and make us better? Bring out the REAL YOU? Bring out the BEST YOU? Rebuild the person you are? Give you your best life NOW?

No, He does not fix us up – we are put to death in Christ. We need to see this. Christianity, resurrection union with Christ is a new creature, a different kind of human being than ever existed before. It is not the old being given a shower or a bath so that it is not dirty anymore. It is not the old being given personality development; given laws to obey. In a nutshell, a Christian ought to be a person whose very being proclaims, “Yet NOT I, but Christ!”

There is only one destiny for the old man in Adam and that is to be crucified with Christ. Paul describes it as, “that the body of sin might be destroyed.” This can be misleading because the English word, “destroyed,” sounds like it is wiped out of existence. But we know this is not the case or we would never sin again. The word, “destroyed,” in Greek means, “to render impotent, or powerless.” Thus -- and the believer will find this to be true – the sin nature continues to be present, and we continue to be able to yield to it, but if we yield to Christ as our life we will find that the sin nature has no power over us.

From a practical standpoint, to the extent that we lose and forsake ourselves and our flesh – and give ourselves to Christ by faith – and make the choice to believe and obey Him – we will find that what God says is true IS true: The old man of sin; the sin nature has NO POWER over us. That is because we are living IN and OUT from Jesus Christ by faith – and in Him is resurrection life and victory.

What we see here is NOT that the old nature is wiped out of existence. But rather, we have entered into He Who is GREATER – into the PERSON whose union with us renders the sin nature impotent, and whose victorious life is our life. But none of this will have an impact and, “just happen.” No. We must, by faith, ABIDE in Him – that is – live IN and OUT FROM Him. We do this by refusing the sin and unbelief and by unconditionally embracing Christ by faith. If we will do that we will find that in Him there is victory and freedom

from the old – for the very reason we are told – that we are in Christ, and that the old man of sin is OUTSIDE of Christ – we are dead to sin but alive to God.

Christians often feel defeated because we assume that if it really is finished in Christ that we should no longer sin – that this should be automatic -- as if God has acted upon us and made sinning impossible. Many continue to ask God to act upon us and deliver us from doing or not doing. But God will meet us with silence. Why? Because if we are born from above Jesus Christ is already in us – we are already one with Him; we have already been freely given all things in Him. God says to us, “Believe and take possession.” He tells us that IN CHRIST that it is already finished and that we need to put ourselves aside and abide IN HIM. If we do, all the resurrection life and power that is in Christ will be there for us.

So we must see this: It IS finished in Christ. But it will only be finished for us in our actual experience if we experience HIM – to the extent that we give ourselves to Him and draw upon Him by faith we will find what God says is true IS indeed true. If we do not abide in Him by faith then the Truth will continue to BE true, but we will not experience it because it is found only IN HIM.

A New Creation

If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed over... (II Cor. 5:17)

We are seeing that to be baptized into Christ – united with Him in His death and resurrection – is not merely religious language. Believers really ARE united with Christ in a spiritual union that carries eternal impacts. Yet HOW are we united with Christ? What constitutes this union? Well, we are united in spirit with Him by the Holy Spirit. Again, believers are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. (I Cor. 6:17) That is HOW Christ dwells in us; how the believer is IN Christ. It is the outcome of being baptized or planted into Christ.

As important as it is to see that we are united with Christ in spirit, it is likewise important to see that we are NOT united with Christ in our soul or psychic nature – i.e., our natural man – and neither are we united with Him physically. Not in this age. In this age we are united with Him only in spirit.

This Truth is brought out all the more in the verse above – adjusted for the proper reading from the original Greek. If anyone is IN CHRIST – this is one who has been joined to Him; baptized into Him – if anyone is IN CHRIST then that person is a NEW creation. In other words, what constitutes the new creation in Christ is the spiritual union of His spirit and our spirit. That is the new man; that is what is born from above. But there is more. As we see from the adjusted reading, “old things are passed over.” What, “old things?” Well, “old things,” are all of the dimensions of your old man in Adam. The old things are that which are crucified with Christ – those aspects of our being that are

NOT joined to the Lord. Those dimensions are passed over as far as being incorporated into the new creation in Christ.

So we have a separation in each believer between that which IS joined to the Lord, and that which is NOT joined to Him. That which IS joined to Him – our human spirit – is regenerated and saved – that joining births the new creation IN THIS AGE. That which is NOT joined to Him remains outside of the new creation – it is, “passed over” – it is not incorporated into the new creation.

This wonderful Truth is gathered up in the next verse, II Cor. 5:18:

Behold all things all things are become new and all things are out from God.

Note that the spiritual union of the believer with Christ – that human spirit with Christ by the spirit of God – births the new creature; constitutes the new creature – but that it is Christ that brings ALL that is of eternal value. “All things,” that are of the eternal are brought to this union by HIM, and nothing is brought by us. In short, He is the source of all that is of God. We are the recipients.

The fact that all that is NEW is out from Christ goes hand in hand with the fact that all that is OLD – which would be out from us -- is not joined to Him. This is a NEW CREATURE – if you will, a different kind of human being from what has ever existed before. Not born OF the Adam race, but born of God in Christ.

Experiencing Jesus Christ

These Truths are embedded in Paul’s teaching in Romans 6 through 8. They are the realities that emerge from the finished and foundational work of Christ: We are baptized INTO Him; buried WITH Him. We have been planted INTO His death – our old man has died WITH Him. We have therefore been raised WITH Him. But they are likewise the realities that make it possible for the believer to go on to live as Paul states: Yield your members unto God as instruments of righteousness. The believer is a new creation in Christ – but this does not bypass us or happen without our experiencing Christ. No. Christ is IN the believer through this new birth and spiritual union, but now wants to both live IN and THROUGH that same believer. We walk with Him in that by faith and obedience.

Being a new creation in Christ is not merely a legal status. It is not merely a LABEL. It is HIS LIFE – it is the Treasure that is Christ in the earthen vessel that is the believer. And it is God’s will that Christ be expressed and manifested. This cannot happen without our voluntary surrender to God; without an active faith and participation.

When we are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him – this is a one-time, one for all, finished event – at that point we are complete IN HIM. (Col. 2:10) There is nothing left of Christ to receive. In fact, not only has God given us ALL of Himself by giving us ALL of Christ, but God has given to us ALL things IN His Son. There is nothing God has left to give:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has, blessed us with all spiritual blessings OUR FROM the heavenly realm in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

***In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)
For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him. (Col. 2:9-10)***

Now note: We do receive all of Christ, and all that God had given in Him, at salvation. But we do not immediately discover or experience all that we have already received in Christ – that requires a lifetime of growth. We must go on – not to receive MORE of Christ – but go on to discover what we have received. This is not a theological or academic discovery. It is an inward, spiritual REALIZATION that emerges from Christ Himself; that emerges from the One with Whom we are joined in spiritual, resurrection union.

In a nutshell – and we will see more of this in Romans 7 – we must actually experience Galatians 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

And likewise, II Cor. 4:

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. (II Cor. 4:10-11)

This is the experience that emerges from the foundation that Paul is laying here in Romans 6. Because we have been united with Christ in both His death and resurrection, we will begin to experience and evidence the impacts of His death and resurrection. It will work towards a life that proclaims: "Yet not I, but Christ!"

God will begin, by His spirit – through a realization of Christ – to renew our minds according to Christ. This will alter, yes, our thinking, but more than

that, our perspective. "The eyes of our understanding will be enlightened that we may KNOW....." (see Eph. 1:18) We will begin to experience the Christ with Whom we are joined – begin to experience all that is in Him – and this will renew our minds, which will then open our hearts so that we can believe and obey God. But the source of it all, despite the fact that we must live in a physical body, despite the fact that we continue to carry a natural man and a sin nature, is Jesus Christ Himself – for all that is of God is OUT FROM HIM as the only source.

Losing to Find

If we were to want one passage that gets to the core of this great experience of death and resurrection with Christ – and the impacts of that experience – we would need only to turn to Matthew 16:

If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 16:24-25)

Here we see that there is only one destiny for the old man. It is not to be fixed up. It is not to find a way to get God to bless the old life in Adam. The only destiny for the old life in Adam is to be crucified with Christ, in other words -- death. If we try to make any other destiny out of this, we are going to end up deceived.

Everywhere in Christianity today, what we essentially have is Christianity presented without the personal cross; without the personal need to be crucified with Christ. Oh, people preach the cross of Christ in the sense that Christ was crucified FOR US -- but so many are blinded to the fact that we have to be crucified WITH Him. All of that is pushed aside. But when you do that, you do not have Christianity anymore.

We need to realize that being crucified with Christ is FREEDOM. It is our salvation being worked out – not merely unto the death of the old, but unto life in the new. If we want to actually LIVE in Christ, and experience Him, we must enter into the baptism into His death. It is always life FROM death. You cannot bypass death and walk in His life.

Nothing could be clearer from the Word of God. And yet today we find a Christianity that is not the product of life from death in Him – but which bypasses the personal cross. Everywhere we have a Christianity that is essentially the old man in Adam turned into a Christian – the old man in Adam given a religion in the name of Christ; offered blessings that are found only IN Christ apart from experiencing Christ Himself.

It is impossible to experience the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Christ without first experiencing Christ Himself. It is impossible to

experience the spiritual blessings that God has given in Christ without first experiencing Christ Himself. All that God has given is found only IN HIM – all of these realities are of HIS LIFE.

But Jesus clearly stated, "IF anyone would come after Me.....that person must lose their life in order to find ME as their life." You and I cannot experience Christ – cannot experience CHRIST AS OUR LIFE – and thus cannot experience all that God has given IN HIM – unless we LOSE our lives to Him. For it is only if we lose OUR lives that we can find Him as our life.

But there is more. Only if we lose our lives, and find Him as our life, can we truly realize Christ and have our mind renewed – only then can we KNOW Him. John stated, "In Him was life, and that life was the LIGHT of men." (John 1:4) And so we have this:

Lose OUR life = find Christ as our life = realize Christ, Who is the only LIGHT of humanity.

We cannot get free from SINS unless we surrender THE SIN in which all SINS are rooted – self-ownership. We must give OURSELVES to Jesus Christ. If we do not know how, then ask God, "to do whatever it takes," to bring us into this reality. And then when God does do, "whatever it takes," we pick up that cross and follow Him.

In Romans 6, when Paul speaks of dying and being raised in Christ, he is speaking of foundational Truths. These are once-for-all finished realities established by Christ in His Redemptive work. But they are dynamic that will forever remain and be carried in the Person of Christ. When we are joined to Him we begin to experience death in Him – yet unto resurrection in Him. In other words, it IS finished, but not that which is finished must be progressively experienced so that we might experience and know Christ Himself.

What Did Christ Bear on the Cross?

There is another Truth revealed in Romans 6 that completely destroys a common error that is taught about the death of Jesus on the Cross: That on the Cross Jesus was bearing the wrath of God. Some have taught God Almighty, when Jesus hung on the cross, was saving us from HIMSELF. Calvinists, especially, teach this. I have heard this stated word for word by Calvinists R.C. Sproul, Steven Lawson, John MacArthur, and many others -- going back 500 years. It is ERROR – indeed, it is grievous error.

This error is easily exposed by understanding Romans 6, but really, by understanding the basics of the finished work of Christ. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul states that no one speaking by the Holy Spirit calls Jesus Christ, "accursed."

You know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and [that] no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. (I Cor. 12:2-3)

To call Jesus Christ, "accursed," means to say that Jesus Christ was devoted to the destruction of God on the Cross -- in order to appease the wrath of God. Paul says that no one speaking by the spirit of God would ever teach this, and yet it is exactly what it means to say that God was, in Christ, saving us from Himself.

Jesus was not bearing God's wrath on the cross. Rather, He was bearing our sin. In fact, Jesus Christ was bearing US – the Adam race -- on the cross of Jesus Christ. And He was doing this, not to save us from God, but to save us from SIN.

Peter says directly:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (I Peter 2:24)

John the Baptist, in announcing Jesus to the world:

Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

And of course, we have this entire chapter of Romans 6 – which says not a single word about Jesus bearing the wrath of God. Rather, the Truth revealed is that Jesus born, "the body of sin" – the Adam race – so that we could be saved from sin and reconciled to God through resurrection as a new creation.

The Bible goes on to reveal that, yes, Jesus did bear the JUDGMENT of God for sin. But that judgment was death – Jesus DIED as our substitute for our sins. But He died for us so that we might die IN HIM – as described all through Romans 6 – and be raised in Him. He did not die as the result of the wrath of God – and thus make it possible for God to life that death from us. Death is never lifted from the Adam race. The Adam race died in Christ – and what is raised is a new creature in Christ.

Paul states here in Romans 6:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over

him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:6-11)

Again we see that Jesus bore in HIMSELF the Adam race – the, “body of sin.” This was the judgment of God. But that is completely different than saying that Jesus bore our punishment of God’s wrath for sin – so that this wrath could be lifted from us. No. Paul clearly states that Jesus bore, “the body of sin,” so that we could be free from SIN. And it is all unto resurrection life in Christ. If all Christ did was bear the wrath of God then there would be nothing about that which would result in becoming a NEW CREATION. We would simply remain in Adam, only now forgiven, with God’s wrath lifted from us.

The Death of the Adam Race

The Adam race died in Christ. That is different from saying that during this age that the Adam race ceased to exist. No, “the body of sin,” was rendered powerless – but only in Christ. What that means is that to the extent that a person lives in Christ – abides in Christ by faith – the, “body of sin,” is powerless over them.

Believers continue to carry the old nature – “the body of sin” – during this age. Paul makes that clear in Romans 7. But we are nevertheless joined to the Lord in spirit. Again we see this separation between what is joined to the Lord in spirit – and what is NOT joined to the Lord – the physical body, and the natural man. The, “body of sin,” continues in that natural man, outside of our union with Christ. But because that, “body of sin,” was been rendered powerless because of the death of Christ, to the extent that we live IN and OUT FROM Christ it will be proven powerless. But if we yield to this, “body of sin,” the power in it remains during this age.

That is why Paul is able to say, “the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.” (see Gal. 5:17) As noted, it is what is behind Romans 7. In fact, in reading down through Romans 6 it is clear that there is a choice to make by believers – a choice to yield to either Christ or to the old man. In Christ, the old man has no power.

We see this Truth in Romans 6:6, where Paul says that the outcome -- the result of our death in Christ -- is that, “the body of sin might be destroyed.” What does that mean? Well, again, “the body of sin,” is the sum total of the sin nature; the sum total of all that came under the control of the enemy – but was crucified with Christ. But that word, “destroyed,” is misleading -- because it sounds as if it is wiped out of existence. We have already seen that this is not true. You and I can sin anytime we want to sin --

just by yielding to it. Thus, when it says, "destroyed" -- the Greek helps. It means, "to render impotent or powerless."

So, we see this separation: We have died and are raised in Christ as a new creation. In Him – in His life – there is freedom from all sin. But the old nature remains. Thus, if we yield to Christ by faith, we will find that the old body of sin cannot control us. But if we yield to the old man of sin, we will sin. The body of sin has had its power broken to the extent that we are yielding to and abiding in a greater power - Christ.

This Truth explains Paul's words to the Colossians and in Romans 8:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new [man], which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all. (Col. 3:5-11)

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Rom. 8:12-13)

In both of these passages we find the English word MORTIFY. The word in the original Greek means, "to destroy by neglect." In other words, we need not fight to win a victory over sin by attacking sin. Rather, we fight by standing and abiding in Christ. Why? Because IN HIM the victory is already won – IN HIM sin has no power. So do not yield to sin – but the real choice is to yield to Christ by faith. None of this would be possible unless the foundational Truth established by Paul in Romans 6 were alive.

We are talking here, not about religion, not merely about doctrine, but we are talking about that which is the most powerful, settled, final reality that has ever been in all of creation - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ -- and what it accomplished in humanity. Our old man, if you are a believer and joined to the Lord is already crucified with Him and the body of sin has been rendered powerless that henceforth, we should not serve sin, for he that is dead is freed from sin. There it is. Do we believe that or not? Will our faith motivate us to OBEY by that faith?

Now you and I need to believe it because the Bible says so and it is the foundation of the redemption but then we need to live it. That is where it gets

difficult because we are going to have our failures – as Paul describes in Romans 7. But how many understand that God will even use our failures as a way of crucifying our self righteousness and our pride?

If we want a place to start we need to go back to the necessity of losing ourselves to Jesus Christ in order to find Him as our life. We can begin by asking the Lord, “Whatever it takes, Lord, do it.” We can believe the Truth and start abiding in that Truth by making such a commitment to the Lord. It is a matter of reckoning ourselves dead to that old sin nature -- but also reckoning ourselves alive to Christ. We do this by faith FIRST – and THEN will experience Christ.

We will waste our time wallowing in our own failures, crying out to God to come down and lift us out of them. He will not do it. He already tells us to reckon ourselves death to sin and alive to God – why? – because WE ARE! We are to reckon AS true what God says IS true – and then we can abide in and yield to Christ, and experience Him.

Freedom From Sin

On the opening verses of Romans 6, we read a rhetorical question asked by Paul. He asked, “Shall we continue in sin because grace abounds?” Paul then answered that question. He stated, “God forbid. How can we who have DIED to sin live any longer therein.” Clearly, the reason believers will not, “continue in sin because grace abounds,” is because believers are DEAD TO SIN. In other words, there is no freedom from sin except through the DEATH of the body of sin. Or to go back to what we saw earlier, if we want freedom from SINS, we must lose the life in which those SINS are rooted – we must lose self-ownership; we must be crucified with Christ in experience.

Again, we repeat this passage:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:6-14)

Note the wording here: Knowing ...knowing... reckon...let not...neither yield...but yield. It is BELIEVING the Truth – knowing the Truth – and then choosing by faith accordingly. Our choices DO NOT create reality or Truth. Our choices are the outcome of believing the Truth – and if we make that choice of faith we will experience that what we believed is the Truth is indeed, in Christ, the Truth! We must enter into these things by faith – and apprehend and embrace them by faith.

We ARE free from sin – from the need to sin, and from the power of the sin nature – but only to the extent that we live in and out from Christ. Practically, this means that if we are born from above, and have lost ourselves to Him as much as we know, we absolutely can turn by faith to Christ. And if we do, we will discover Christ as the power of God over all. It does not matter how we feel, or how many times we have failed – it does not matter what mental or emotional or physical roadblocks the enemy puts in our way. Jesus Christ is our life and in Him is all power.

By faith we can discover that you are dead to sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. As we discover and experience Christ Himself we will discover freedom from sin – because we dead to sin IN HIM – and we will discover that we are alive to God.

But you see, it is here that once again we see a common error. Christians tend to seek freedom from sin as a separate experience from Jesus Christ. We pray, “God, give me freedom from sin.” We think of this freedom as a condition or as a thing God can give us. No. God answers, “I have only MY SON to give you. In Him, and in Him alone, is freedom from sin. Lose yourself and embrace Him. Believe and abide in Him.”

Christians care capable of coming up with all kinds of gimmicks to get free from sin – from this sin or that sin. But that is not the real need. What we need freedom from is UNBELIEF. Again – read down through Romans 6. Is there even a hint or a suggestion that it is not finished for each believer in Christ – or that experiencing Christ requires anything but faith – and the obedience that emerges from faith? Experience the Person of Jesus Christ and you will discover that one of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that is hid in Him is an apprehension of this Truth of freedom from sin. You will discover the experiencing of Jesus Christ that our Christian doctrine describes. It will be reality and not religion.

Let not...But

Paul says, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body...” In other words, don’t yield to sin and let it have its way in you...”that you should obey it and the lusts thereof.” This is a matter of something rising up in you and it does not have to be sexual lust or some terrible temper tantrum or smoking or drinking. It could be pride. It could be boasting. It could be self

righteousness. Don't let those things reign in your mortal body. Don't obey them and the lusts thereof. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." Well, it tells us right there that it is possible to do so. "But yield yourselves unto God as those who are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." In short, don't yield to sin, but yield to God. But it is not a matter of just sitting there and fighting sin. No, it is a yielding to God – based on faith in the Person of Christ -- instead of sin. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

Now notice again, very carefully, that phrase, "For sin shall not have dominion over you." In other words, you do not have to sin. Sin is no longer your master – if you abide in Christ.

It takes time to learn all of this, to walk through it and experience it. And we will never be sinless in this age. But the power of sin, as we have already seen, is broken for the believer to the extent that we yield to Christ as our life by faith.

Now, in the rest of this chapter six, Paul brings in a lot of other factors based on what he has already said. He asks, beginning in verse 15, "What then..." In other words, "on the basis of what I have said, "...shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" It is the same question with which he began the chapter -- and he gives the same answer, "God forbid. Don't you know that to whom you yield yourselves as servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Isn't this the truth? Human beings are dependent creatures and the very structure of our being is along that line -- so that the more that we yield to something, the more we belong to it. He is saying, "Don't yield to the flesh. You were the servants of sin -- but you have obeyed from the heart the truth which was delivered to you. Thus, being made free from sin you became the servants of righteousness."

He also says, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of the flesh." In other words, Paul is acknowledging, as he does in the latter half of chapter seven in Romans, that this is a process -- and we are going to have failures -- but we need to be headed in the right direction. "So, I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh -- for as you have yielded your members as servants to uncleanness unto iniquity, even so now, yield your members as servants to righteousness unto holiness."

It is a fact that the more you obey God and surrender yourself to Him, the more that Jesus Christ becomes the Living Lord of you. We do not often think of giving ourselves to Christ, or of obeying Christ, as our acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord – but it is exactly that. It is a yielding, by faith and love, to the

One to Whom we belong. It means freedom and experiencing Him leading into the eternal ages.

Paul then asks, "What fruit did you have in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin and having become servants of God, you have your fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death..." You EARN death by sinning. "...but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." God wants us to stop trying to earn and to start receiving His eternal gift.

Foundations

Romans 6 is such a pivotal and foundational chapter of the Bible. Paul so clearly and systematically goes through what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ accomplished FOR the believer – but brings it forward to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of what He accomplished IN the believer.

Romans 6 speaks of the foundations of the redemption. Foundations, yes, that we must have doctrinally -- but foundations, wherein, having established the doctrines, we must now go in and do what the doctrines tell us to do -- experience the Person and all that is in Him -- everything He is and all that He has done. That would be Paul's exhortation to us here in Romans 6 as he continues on into Romans 7.

Chapter 7 Romans 7 The Christian Struggle and Victory

In Romans 6, Paul describes both the finality of, and the basis of victory, over the power of sin through our death and resurrection in Christ. But in Romans 7, he describes the struggle to LIVE IT OUT.

Despite the claims of some people, Paul is not describing only his past in Romans 7. Paul is not saying, "I used to struggle with the flesh, and with sin, but now I don't anymore." No. Paul is describing what is possible for any born again believer. This is not to say that we will not grow to overcome sin on many levels. But in this physical life, the battle to live out the finished work of Jesus will never be over.

I say this because I have met people who say they never sin. Yep, I sure have. They claim that if victory in Christ is real, then it ought to mean that we never sin. (One wonders how the Spirit of Truth could be in a person whose says they have no sin. See I John 1:10) In Truth, a Christian is supposed to stand by faith EVEN when we sin. That, according to Paul, IS VICTORY.

Married to Another

Know you not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman which has an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Romans 7 does not begin with an extensive teaching on the subject of divorce and remarriage. This is not the context. Rather, Paul is simply using marriage as an analogy for our relationship with God's law. He tells us that normally a woman is bound for life to her husband. But just as a woman is bound for life to her husband, so are we bound to the law as our husband -- as long as we are alive in Adam. But Paul's point is that we are no longer alive in Adam. Rather, the good news is that in Christ we are dead to the law -- we HAVE died, and therefore our marriage to the law is broken. Thus, we are free to marry ANOTHER -- Christ Himself.

Can we see this? Paul wants us to know that through our death in Christ we are as freed from the law as a wife is freed from her marriage if her husband

dies. Paul even says that we are free to, "marry another," and, "bring forth fruit unto God."

Now, if you read this passage, you cannot possibly emerge thinking that a Christian is still married to the law. Indeed, we see a complete severing of that relationship – so drastic that Paul is able to use this analogy of the death of a spouse. Paul says that our marriage to the law is completely SEVERED by death. We are, in fact, married to ANOTHER, namely Jesus Christ. And now we can bear fruit unto God.

In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that if you and I were not completely freed from the law through the death of Christ, then our marriage to Christ is like adultery -- for we are still married to the law. But no. We are dead to the law. We are married to another, Jesus Christ.

This analogy between a marriage broken by death, and our relationship to the law broken by death in Christ, is a wonderful picture. Yet how many of us continue to try to live as if we are still married to the law! -- it is as senseless as it would be to try to live in a marriage relationship with a spouse that has died!

No. We are so free that we can marry ANOTHER -- Jesus Christ -- and bear fruit unto God! Indeed, this shows that before our marriage to the law was severed by death, that we could NOT bear fruit unto God. No. Under the law fruit unto God is impossible. Only if we are married to another -- to Christ -- is fruit unto God possible. This is exactly what Paul is trying to tell us in these verses.

Now, if you get nothing else out of this verse, please note this: Being set free from the law and married to Christ does NOT result in a life of license and sin. Anyone who thinks that this would be the case ought to go back and read chapter 6 – Paul goes through that whole objection. He says, "God forbid!"

But even here in chapter 7, Paul tells us that being freed from the law won't result in a life of sin. Why does it not result in sin? Because even though we are freed from the law, we are MARRIED TO ANOTHER, Jesus Christ. We will bear fruit unto God. Thus, rather than result in a life of sin, being freed from the law frees us to greater possibilities for holiness and obedience.

What? Do we think that being married to Christ is going to be LESS of a holy life than that which was possible under the law? Hardly. The fruit we bear unto God is going to include good works and holiness.

But wait. If you read on to the next verse, Paul says that when we were under the law, we brought forth fruit unto DEATH. This ought to settle it for the legalists -- if they would just READ and BELIEVE. There is NO Godly fruit that can come from being under the law. Thus, it is not a question of whether being set free from the law will result in sin. NOT being set free from the law

is sin and death! Why can't people see that? Our marriage to the law must be broken by the death of Christ so that we can marry Christ -- and then Godly fruit is possible.

If we are ONE with Christ -- married to Him through death and resurrection -- we are set free from our first husband, the law. We ARE married to another. But being married to Christ means holiness, obedience, and glory to God. It means that we will bear fruit to God!

Legalism

Paul says is that we are, "dead to the law through the body of Christ." We are dead to our old husband. This is because we died in Christ. Yes, Christ bore all sin in His body on the Cross, (see I Peter 2:24) and accordingly, bore all judgment for sin. But as we saw in Romans 6, in a very real sense, WE DIED IN HIM. Our OLD MAN OF SIN is dead in Christ. Thus, when the law comes to us with it's demands, and with it's penalty upon us for falling short, it finds a dead person. A dead person cannot be condemned anymore. The penalty is paid in Christ.

But on the positive side, when the law comes to us with it's demands, the law does find Christ in us -- and Christ in us is the fulfillment of the just requirement of the law. We are new creatures IN HIM.

Clearly, because we are new creations in Christ, we are no longer of the creation to which the law applies. We will see later that this doesn't mean we sin. No. In fact, we become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ! But the law cannot accomplish this. It can be accomplished only through death and resurrection.

Having just said that being married to Christ will result in our, "bringing forth fruit unto God," Paul hearkens back to life under the law. He says that under the law, "the motions of sins did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Thus, we have a contrast: Under the law, we bring forth fruit unto death. In Christ, we bring forth fruit unto God.

FRUIT is the end of a growth process. If you want to live UNDER THE LAW the fruit will be death. This will be the case even if you think you are the most obedient person in the world. Why? Because the best being under the law can

produce, rather than righteousness, is ***SELF-righteousness***. And self-righteousness is DEATH.

Have we recognized that self-righteousness is SIN -- one of the worst sins of all? Sure. That is because it is a substitute -- through unbelief -- for the righteousness of God through Christ.

Those who are, "under the law," obey God -- but not because they trust in Christ -- but because they don't. They don't trust Christ to be their righteousness, and so they seek to maintain their own through law-keeping. This is unbelief, and the fruit will always be death -- self-righteousness being the core problem.

Herein we see the definition of LEGALISM -- a more modern term for what Paul calls, "being under the law." Legalism is me using my obedience to God to make myself right with God -- to make myself righteous. Notice that the obedience isn't the problem. It's the faith I put in it -- the faith I put in MYSELF. THAT is the problem. The solution to legalism is to repent of the unbelief behind it and to begin believing and walking in Christ.

There are generally two types of people who live in legalism. First, there are those who are always trying to be righteous through law-keeping, but failing. But instead of turning to Christ by faith, they just keep trying harder -- and usually they live in constant defeat and condemnation. In time, they may doubt that Christianity is the Truth. They may use their own failures as supposed evidence that Christianity does not work. But the problem is that they are trying to live in Christ on a completely wrong basis. They are trying to push into the Truth by living in error. It won't work. I think there are more people like this than we think.

The second type of person is one that is trying to be righteous through law-keeping, and have themselves convinced that they have succeeded. These are the Pharisees among us. In one sense of the word, this condition is worse than that of a person who lives in defeat. At least the defeated person is seeing the Truth about themselves -- they are seeing they CANNOT keep the law. But the Pharisee doesn't see that, and usually it is because they have somewhere hardened their heart.

And yet if you examine both of these types of people -- the defeated, and the Pharisee -- you will find that they are both guilty of the very SAME unbelief. They are both SELF-righteous. The defeated are frustrated in their attempt to be righteous. The Pharisee is satisfied. But they are both under the law -- trying to make themselves righteous by works. They are simply blind in differing ways.

Self-righteousness is DEATH. Have we realized that? Sure. For if have not come to terms with the finished work of Christ for sin, then sin -- or "the motions of sins" -- must be dealt with. Sin isn't going to go away. We MUST

deal with it. And HOW we deal with it will be either life or death to us. If we deal with it by trying to make ourselves righteous through works, then death will be the result. But if we let our sin drive us to the grace of God in Christ, there will be LIFE.

So, Paul tells us that the solution to being under the law is to be set free from it through DEATH IN CHRIST, and to be married to ANOTHER, namely HIM. Sure. The only solution is death and resurrection. The solution is to become a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Problem: Death

In the final analysis, the problem with the human race -- the problem with those in Adam -- is that we are DEAD. This is the core problem, and all sin emerges from it -- spiritually dead have an heredity of SIN. So the problem with spiritually dead people is found in what they ARE, not merely in what they DO. Thus, you cannot fix their nature by requiring that those people keep LAWS. No. Dead people cannot gender in themselves life through good works. Rather, the only solution is for them to take their place in the death of Christ, and to be raised as new creations.

But God did give His law for a purpose. If not because He thought we could keep it, then why? Well, if you do give dead sinners LAW, that law will SHOW THEM THEY ARE SINNERS. This is exactly what Paul says that the law of God DOES -- it shows spiritually dead people that they ARE dead. But all unto a greater purpose -- the law was given to show us that our only hope was LIFE through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Now we know that what things whatsoever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. (Rom 3:19-21)

If I face the law of God and am honest, the law will shut me up with regards to my own righteousness through works. Rather, it will show me as hopelessly guilty before God. But that is good news because it will likewise point me to the righteousness found APART from the law -- in Christ Jesus.

Note the futility of trying to find LIFE through the keeping of the very law that God gave to show us that we are DEAD! You cannot prop up a corpse through law-keeping. Rather, you expose the corpse AS a corpse -- because the corpse will continually fail to keep that law. Then, once you realize that you ARE DEAD, you will come -- not to the law -- but to Christ. You will come to Christ for LIFE.

It is amazing how many professing Christians cannot see this Truth. Have we realized that this IS the gospel of grace? Yet, despite the continual teaching of the Bible on this matter, Christians continue to live under the law, married to the law, and continue to try to maintain their righteousness -- which equals trying to maintain your SALVATION -- through works.

The Motions of Sins

Well, back to our passage. In the above passage, Paul says that, "the motions of sins," were BY the law. What does that term mean?

The word, "motions," means, "passions, feelings, power." So, in other words, Paul is saying that the dynamic of sin – and all that it does in us – is AMPLIFIED, that is, pointed out, by the law. But surely we know that Paul is not saying that the law MAKES us sinners – that is, he isn't saying that the law causes us to sin, or injected us with the sin nature. No. So what is he getting at?

When any person tries to make themselves righteous by obeying the law, then, by definition, they KNOW the law. They are looking at the law. But what will happen in that case is that the law will be like a magnifying glass -- making bigger every sin we have. In other words, the law will amplify and define sin in us, and exact holy judgment. This will, to us, be like sin coming alive all the more in us -- we will begin to see things in ourselves that we never knew were there. This is how the law works -- it exposes us and shows the, "motions of sins." And in doing that, it leaves us buried in condemnation.

But it doesn't end there. The greatest, "motion of sin," is often what we DO about our sin -- that is, if we don't turn to Christ. Once the law exposes our sins, and shows us to be an even greater sinner than we imagined, often what we do is try to fix the problem, either through MORE law-keeping, or perhaps by just giving up and living in despair. Both are SIN -- they are unbelief. None of this would happen if we weren't trying to live UNDER THE LAW. Thus, this is why Paul says that the motions of sins are BY THE LAW. It is as if the law sets in motion this unending cycle of works, sin, unbelief, works, sin, and unbelief, etc. The more the law is applied, the more it sets sin in motion -- the more it demands that we DO SOMETHING WITH OUR SIN. And if we don't turn to Christ, anything else we do IS SIN -- it is of unbelief.

Can we see that this trap is really the mercy of God? That His law is absolutely geared to giving us no place to hide? -- so that we will finally turn to Christ! The law of God is like a big LIGHT. The moment I turn and face God's law, it is like a big light being shined on a bunch of bugs and critters that were in darkness -- they all get in motion and try to hide! But you see, if I do try to hide, rather than turn to Christ, then the sin that has been set in motion is unbelief! But if I do turn to Christ, then I will be set free, and married to another -- Jesus Himself.

So according to Paul, the law actually genders the, "motions of sins." That is because the more I am exposed to the law, the more I will squirm – the more I will feel naked, and condemned, and have to do something about sin. The law will be like a microscope, or that which sensitizes me, TO SIN. And if I am unsaved, and am not yet turning to Christ, what I will do about it is try to cover my nakedness and compensate for my sin. This, in turn, IS SIN – and just makes things all the worse.

To see a clear picture of this, all we need to do is go back to Adam just after his sin. God created him, "naked and unashamed" – fully dependent, but fully completed by God – to the point where he was not conscious of his nakedness. But once he declared his independence from God, he was still naked, but then, "ashamed." That is because without God he was incomplete. Adam responded by trying to cover his nakedness with fig leaves. This is a picture of man trying to fix himself and deal with sin – outside of Jesus Christ. He is naked, but forever trying to sew together some gimmick that will cover himself and make himself presentable, if not to God, then to himself.

To try to fix sin without Christ IS SIN. But we don't usually think we are guilty of this, especially as Christians. But anything short of resting in faith in the finality of the Cross is equal to trying to use fig leaves to compensate for my nakedness. Some of us use religion. Some of us use works. Others have emotional gimmicks, and yet others, intellectual devices – all geared to trying to cover what God wants to EXPOSE.

Where the law comes in is right at that point – the law exposes and exposes me as a dead and naked sinner. The law, if you will, peels off the fig leaves, and will even show me that it was sin to use them. But if I remain UNDER THE LAW, the more the law exposes me as hopeless, the more I will try to cover what the law exposes – using some gimmick. Usually hidden from me in all of this is the reality of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Until I see that Truth, and embrace Christ, I will continue to live in this irresolvable cycle, bringing forth fruit unto death.

Faith in Christ

Paul takes for granted that a Christian does NOT want to sin. In Romans 7, he says that about himself. But then he tells us he DOES sin. The context is what we need to do in that case. What do we do, even as Christians, when the law of God exposes us as hopeless?

The answer he gives begins, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." In effect, Paul goes right back to Romans 6, and wants his reader to realize the finality of the Cross. Unless we start there, we can't get far.

And yet do we really see what Paul is telling us, and what he is NOT telling us? Unless we do, we will miss the whole point. Is Paul saying, "The solution to the motions of sins -- the solution to the power of sin -- is law-keeping?" Nope. In fact, that is exactly what he wants us to understand is NOT the solution. Rather, Paul says, "The solution to realize you are FREED from the law, but alive to God."

The Christian is, "married to another," and brings forth fruit unto God. This includes obedience to God's law. But the important thing to see is this: Christians are not to try to make themselves righteous, or maintain their righteousness, through obedience. Rather, we are to obey God knowing that in Christ we are already as righteous as we are ever going to be.

This is the righteousness that is by FAITH. If it is real, it is not going to result in sin. It will actually result in wanting to obey God all the more.

Here we find a great principle that governs everything we have been seeing to this point. That principle is this: **All obedience in the Christian life is supposed to be the OUTCOME of being rightly related to Christ by faith.** Contrast this over an against the error of trying to BECOME rightly related to Christ by obedience.

Real faith in Christ always results in CHRIST IN US -- and Christ in us IS our righteousness. (see I Cor. 1:30) And Christ in us will tend towards OBEDIENCE. We will obey God, not to make ourselves right with Him, but as the result of BEING RIGHT with Him. In short, you cannot fall in love with Christ -- be married to Him -- and end up wanting to sin. No. You will want to obey.

The reason Christian people have such a difficult time understanding these things is because we have not been taught the meaning of true conversion, or really, even the true meaning of Christianity. Christianity is CHRIST IN US. Once I understand this, the whole issue of law-keeping falls into place.

Christ IS our life. We have been born again FROM ABOVE. This means that there is LIFE IN US that we weren't born into this world WITH. And since we came to have that new life through repenting of sin, we aren't going to emerge from repentance from sin WANTING to sin.

But you see, if I think Christianity is nothing but a list of teachings to believe in, or a list of laws to keep, this won't make any sense to me. But no. Christianity is CHRIST IN US -- it is a matter of being raised WITH CHRIST.

As Paul said to the Galatians, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4) In other words, if we do not live by faith -- if we do not live in the power of Christ -- we may as well not have Christ in us. He will be of, "no effect," to

us. It is entirely possible to be set free from the power of sin, but through unbelief, to live IN sin. You can bring yourself back into bondage.

I am not talking about losing your salvation. I am talking about being saved, but for Christ to have, "no effect," for us as to LIVING in our freedom from the power of sin, and in freedom from condemnation FOR sin. Over and over in the epistles, we are exhorted to, "put on," the new man, and to, "put off," the old man. It is possible to BE a new man in Christ, but to neglect to put HIM ON. It is possible to be planted in Christ, as we saw in Romans 6, but to neglect to yield your members to God as one who IS alive from the dead.

The Conviction of the Law

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

Paul has just told us that the law points out sin, indeed, if you get under the law, you will actually be buried beneath the hopelessness of your condition. So he wants to make sure we don't think that the law is a bad thing, or that the law is sin. No. Rather, the law is holy, just, and good. And yet that is precisely WHY the law slays us. When we stand face to face with the law of God, we are shown to be unholy, unjust, and bad.

Paul is saying that the law DEFINES sin – not only verbally, but the law of God points it out in US. Indeed, the law digs into us and AMPLIFIES our sin. And since there is really no end to the depth of our sin, if we are under the law, the law just digs deeper and deeper – exposing us as hopeless. If we don't turn to grace there is no resolution to this, and really, as Paul is pointing out, we will be shown places in ourselves that we could not have imagined.

Of course, the whole point here is NOT that the law MAKES us sinners. But the law shows us as the sinners we are through natural birth. But since we don't realize what we are, when the law shows us, it is new, and alarming to US. And yet the good news is that God has known all of this from the start, and yet sent Christ.

Paul clearly says that rather than the law being sin, the law made him to know his own sin. The law brings definition to sin – but not just, "out here," on paper – rather the law absolutely exposes the sin in each one of us. That is why Paul says, "Sin took occasion by the commandment." In other words, the commandment was the occasion – was as a big light shining upon Paul – that exposed in him all kinds of evil. In that sense, had there never been a law given by God, sin would be dead – it would not have occasion to be defined and pointed out.

So here we begin to see the purpose of the law of God. The law cannot save us – but the law shows us we need to be saved solely BY GRACE. The law was not given because God actually expected us to be able to make ourselves righteous by it – rather, the law was given to show us that save the grace of God we can never be righteous. The law remains, and will evermore be, the written manifestation of the righteousness of God. It will never be abolished or watered-down. But again – that is precisely why we must be saved by grace through faith.

Slain by the Law

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

Paul continues his theme on the purpose of the law. Here we see that as a natural man – as someone who was a Jew trying to keep the law – Paul thought that he was alive, well, and doing quite fine as it pertained to righteousness. Is this not how we think of ourselves BEFORE God convicts us? Sure. Without the conviction of the Holy Spirit – and sometimes this conviction comes through the law of God – we will think we are alive. But once we stand before the holiness of God, and before the righteousness demanded by the law – we are at once shown to be dead. We will, at that point, see that we never were alive – but it took the law of God through the conviction of the Holy Spirit to wake us up to this fact.

Now, what we see here is that even though the law shows us condemned without Christ – this is really ILLUMINATION. The law is exposing to us the TRUTH – about ourselves, and about Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, the law is a schoolmaster to LEAD US TO CHRIST. That is God's purpose for the law, even if it is not man's purpose. Men use the law to defeat God's purpose, but God's purpose stands.

Now note an important distinction: There are some that teach that when Paul says that the law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ – they teach that it is by our keeping of the law that we eventually come to Christ for salvation. But this is really the opposite of the Truth. It is not by our keeping of the law that we are led to Christ – rather, it is by the fact that we fail to keep the law that we are led to Christ. This is Paul's whole point – the law points out sin and slays us as sinners. THEN we know to come to Christ, because we know grace is our only hope. In short, the law illuminates us to our true condition, for the purpose of leading us to Jesus Christ, that we might be saved by grace through faith.

The Law is Good

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Paul wants his readers to understand that he is not saying that the law is bad. Or that we can ignore obedience, holiness, and submission to God. Rather, his whole point is that the law is holy, just, and good – that is exactly WHY the law condemns us, and exactly WHY we cannot hope to keep it. So, in short, Paul is saying the law is the righteousness of God in written form. But we are NOT righteous. Thus, "by the commandment, sin might be shown to be exceedingly sinful." Again – all unto the purpose of pointing us to the living righteousness found only through CHRIST IN US.

We will see later, in chapter 8, that while we cannot keep the perfect law, Christ died that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, and that CHRIST IN US is the very embodiment of righteousness.

The Normal Christian Life

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

It is amazing that people can read this passage and think that Paul is talking about himself BEFORE he was saved. As mentioned before, I have even heard some professing Christians claim that if we are born again, we have no sin, no sin nature, and are completely sanctified as to experience and practice. But if this is true, than it is possible to be as sinless as Jesus was sinless, and to live without ever sinning again. Is that YOUR experience? Do you actually think you never sin? It sure wasn't Paul's experience. And it isn't what the Bible ever teaches as possible during this life.

The fact is, a Christian has TWO natures – two laws of nature. We always will as long as we have physical bodies, and live within a fallen creation. You have the treasure, Jesus Christ, but IN an earthen vessel. This is why Paul talks

about putting ON the new man, and putting OFF the old man. That is why he says to walk in the Spirit so that you won't satisfy the lusts of the flesh. None of that would make sense if we didn't have the possibility or presence of the sin nature.

But the POWER of the old man is broken through the Cross. Romans 6 tells us that we are completely crucified and risen with Christ – we are new creations in Christ Jesus. But in Romans 6, Paul also tells us, "let not sin reign in your mortal body." Well, there would be no need for him to say, "Let not...," if it wasn't possible to LET. In other words, through the Redemption we are absolutely set free from the POWER of the old nature. But we are not set free from the PRESENCE or the POSSIBILITY of sin. That is why John says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us."

If you have been born again, you have received a LIFE that is totally contrary to the life you received through natural birth. You are NOT a rehabilitated OLD creation – no, you are a completely NEW creation. But the reason it doesn't seem like it is because the residual patterns, and the presence, of the old creation, remains. The new creation is spiritual and within. The Christian life is a matter of bringing that old under the power of the new – it is a matter of the kingdom of God within us coming to govern that old kingdom in us.

But you see, because the life we receive through the new birth is contrary, indeed FOREIGN, to what we are used to, we won't understand it. We won't even sense it at first, because we will continue to be buried beneath our emotions and intellect. And yet the Spirit within is NOT emotions and NOT brains. It is Christ Himself.

A born again person is born again from the inside out. The seat of the new birth is that our spirit is made one with the Spirit of God – through the Holy Spirit we are made ONE with Christ. This is salvation, and the basis of our new identity in Christ. But the rest of us must be brought under the control or government of the new life. This is sanctification – and even though CHRIST IN US is everything we need to be brought on into sanctification – this is merely potential. We must go on through faith and obedience if we are to actually experience sanctification. And in addition, as we grow in Christ, the new life within, that was once foreign to us, will come to be normal for us. Hopefully, the old law of sin and death will become more and more foreign.

But this growth process does take time and warfare. This is why it is entirely possible to be saved, but to have all kinds of struggles and warfare over sin. In fact, the struggle may be evidence that you are saved, rather than evidence you are not. It takes TWO natures to make for warfare, and therefore, if you are not having any warfare in this area, something is missing – either you are not saved, or you are saved, but you have relinquished the battle. The flesh and the Devil never stop making war against the Spirit. So if warfare has ceased, this is a red flag, for the Bible says, "For the flesh lusts against the

Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. "(Gal 5:17) Isn't this exactly what Paul is teaching in Romans 7? So we see that a war in this area is not only normal, but can be evidence that you are making progress.

Now, certainly warfare as a thing unto itself isn't the goal. Rather, everything Paul is describing in Romans 7 is supposed to be UNTO victory. On the heels of the Truth of Romans 6 – which is the finality of the Redemption – Paul is digressing in Romans 7 to show that it is normal to LIVE OUT that finality. But nevertheless, he says, that victory is assured through faith in the finality of the Cross.

Above, Paul says that he often has the WILL TO DO, but cannot DO. And he says that often he has the WILL TO STOP DOING, but cannot stop. According to Paul, this is evidence of TWO LAWS. One the one hand, his WILL TO OBEY is evidence of the Holy Spirit, his new birth, and a witness that he agrees with the holy law of God. But on the other hand, there is another law – the law of sin and death. This law – and it is really a NATURE – stands at odds with his desire to obey God.

It is important to realize that in Romans 7 and 8, when Paul talks about the two laws, he is really making reference to our TWO NATURES. There is the law of the old nature – the way it operates, it's characteristics, and functionality. But there is the law of the new nature. These two natures, or forces that comprise us when we are saved, oppose each other IN US. It was that way for Paul. He said, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

You will notice that Paul says, "I see another law at work in my members." So he isn't simply talking about theology here. He is talking about a nature or a law that is operative IN HIM when it comes to sin. The core of it is the sin nature, but Paul is describing a law that is at work WHEN he sins. In fact, this, "law of sin," is CONTRARY to the law of God, and certainly to the Holy Spirit.

What is Paul talking about? Well, he is talking about how the flesh, or old nature, operates when the law exposes it. Notice – this is not about how we respond in faith to Christ. No. Rather, the law of sin and death is how the flesh – apart from Christ – operates when the law shows us to be hopeless sinners. We try to hide. We try to cover our nakedness. We try to rationalize, or make excuses, or make promises to do better. Sure. Once the law corners us as sinners, the, "the law of sin and death," brings exactly what the term indicates: Death – and all of those ploys I just mentioned are the fruits of death, not of LIFE.

The law of sin and death is what we are left with pertaining to our sin if we don't believe and rest in the finality of the Cross. The law of sin and death is really what operates in our flesh, according to natural means, when our sin is

exposed. We are like a ping pong ball, going back and forth between sin and death, sin and death, etc. There is no finality, because the only finality is found at the Cross. The law of sin and death will operate in us, and really bring us to a hopeless sense over our sin unless we do as Paul did – by pass it by putting faith in Christ.

Victory in Christ Jesus

Do you feel continually hopeless over certain sins in your life? Do you feel like you will never be able to get free? Or that there must be something wrong with you – as a Christian – because you continue to sin, or because you continue to be dragged down into despair by your failures? If this is true about you, then you are NOT believing – and the result is that you are under the law – the law of sin and death has you controlled. Paul's answer is simply this:

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Christ in us NOW delivers us from, "the body of this death," and from the law of sin and death. But we must believe. We must WALK IN THE SPIRIT OF LIFE, and put OFF the body of sin and death. As always, without faith we aren't going to get very far.

So again we see that the key to victory over the power of sin is not to turn in upon sin and try to make it go away. No. The key is to turn to Christ and walk in the power of His resurrection. As Paul says in Galatians, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that ye would." (Gal 5:16-17)

But you and I will never turn to Christ and walk in the Spirit if we don't BELIEVE and rest in the finality of the Cross. If you don't believe you are free from the power of sin, you won't walk in the power of the resurrection.

And what is it that hinders our faith? Well, our failures. Our sin. It is ironic that the very thing over which Christ has victory is the very thing we allow to keep us from victory. We won't believe we have victory until we see ourselves living it. This is blindness. It doesn't work that way. But if we believe we WILL live it.

Paul has already told us that despite the fact that we ARE free, that there is going to be an ongoing process, and in that process we will often FAIL. But his entire point is that our failures do not negate the VICTORY of Jesus! The victory of Christ is not contingent upon our obedience! If we continue to trust in what Christ has done, and stop trusting in what WE can do, or don't do, the power of His resurrection in us cannot fail.

But if we continue to bounce back and forth, based on OUR works, then we are, whether we realize it or not, UNDER THE LAW. And this will bring forth fruit unto death.

Paul says NO. This is not victory. Then he repeats to us the key. He admits, "I am a wretched man. Who will deliver me from this terrible thing that I am in my flesh? Jesus Christ has delivered me! Therefore, even though I continue to serve the nature of sin with my flesh -- I serve the law of God with my mind, heart, and intent. THAT is victory. THAT is faith."

When we read Romans 6-8, we are reading MORE than just a description of a LEGAL reality. We are NOT new creations merely from a legal point of view. Christianity is a LIVING reality in Christ Jesus. We are born anew from above and have been given the very life of Christ in us. Paul is trying to tell us what that is, why that is, and how to live in it.

Chapter 8

Romans 8

Sons and Daughters of God

In Romans 6, Paul brought together everything he had been saying about the fact that Christians are no longer under the law. His conclusion was not that we are free to sin, or that we should even want to sin. Rather, his conclusion was that we are DEAD TO SIN, and ALIVE to God. Much of Romans 6 is focused on WHY this is so, and HOW this is so, and the absolutely necessity of seeing and believing it.

In Romans 7, Paul digresses to address the problems we will encounter as we walk in the Truth of Romans 6. Fundamental to these problems is the fact that even though we are new creations in Christ, and as free from the power of sin as we are ever going to be, we nevertheless continue to live in, "the body of flesh." In other words, we are free from the power of sin, but not the presence or possibility of it. The Christian life is one where we grow to see the Truth and have our minds renewed by it – and this will translate more and more into an ability and willingness to walk in victory over sin and unbelief. Romans 7 assures us that our growing experience of the victory of Christ will never be complete in this life – even though the victory of Christ IS complete.

Romans 8 takes things to the next level. It begins with a THEREFORE – Paul is going to tell us what the Truths he shared in Romans 6 and 7 mean as to the Christian life. If we are dead to sin and alive to God, and if we nevertheless continue to live in a natural body, then HOW does this all come together in a walk with Jesus Christ? What does it mean, "to walk in the Spirit," as opposed to the flesh? Romans 8 answers many of these questions.

A New Creation

We will never understand Romans 8, let alone most of the NT, if we do not understand what a Christian IS. And the fact of the matter is, many Christians do not understand what a Christian IS. If we could just get that straight, we could see the framework from which Paul operates, and understand his words.

What is a Christian? Well, to begin, let's note a few things that a Christian is NOT. First, a Christian is not merely the adherent to a new religion. It is entirely possible to be taught a religion called, "Christianity," and to memorize the doctrines, and assent to keep the rules, and to plug oneself into a good church – but to miss completely the Truth. Indeed, it is entirely possible to know all the true doctrines of the Bible – and God knows we NEED to know them and that we NEED to teach them – but it is entirely possible to know and teach them all, but to never SEE JESUS or SEE the TRUTH. Of course, if we would actually see Jesus, and see the Truth, we would also see that our doctrines do tell the Truth about Him – but Christianity is not merely facts,

information, teachings, and doctrines ABOUT Christ. Christianity is CHRIST IN US – and a growing to KNOW HIM, and a growing to come under His Lordship.

One of the best passages in the Bible that illustrates this distinction is found in the book of Job – at the end of Job's great trial. But to set the stage, we must first remember that God had lauded Job as a good and upright man – God said this at the beginning of the trial. I believe Him, don't you? And, even at the end of Job's trial, God chided Job's friends by saying to them, "You have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has." (Job 42:7) So as confused and emotional as Job was during the trial, God was nevertheless able to say that he had spoken rightly of God! Most people haven't believed that about Job, but this is what God said about him. But now we can turn to Job's confession – and in it we see a big difference between believing the right things ABOUT GOD, and seeing God Himself.

Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not... I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye sees thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:3-6)

Job had heard many wonderful doctrines and teachings about God. He had even uttered them himself – Job had taught others RIGHTLY about God. But in the end, Job had to say, "I said right things – but I didn't realize what I was saying. I didn't realize that I had reduced God down to words, teachings, doctrines, and rules. I thought in doing so that I was hot stuff – I thought I was mature and righteous. But now that I SEE GOD HIMSELF – I must repent. I must repent of saying more than I knew and taking pride in it."

Christians often create for themselves a God in their own image. And much about this God we create, if He is constructed out of our understanding of Bible verses, and out of a sincere heart, might be factually correct. When we encounter problems in life, or experience blessings, we might plug Bible verses and our intellectual understanding of God into them, and form a basis that is sound, as far as it goes. Indeed, we can spend years living in a supposed relationship with the God that we have formed out of our own understanding, intellect, emotions, and theology. But this is NOT the same as SEEING GOD. The problem arises when we think it is the same, and congratulate ourselves. This is where Job erred.

But God loved Job and brought him into a trial that shattered this whole pattern. You will again note that God did not, in Job's case, tell him that all of his doctrines and teachings were wrong. No – but God did have to show Job that GOD HIMSELF was not a doctrine, or a religious pattern. And when Job saw God, he was set free.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE GOD." So if you want to see God, He will have to purify your heart. Now, your heart may be pure as far as you know, but you can almost be certain that it is NOT – and all

that his necessary to prove this is a trial geared to exposing it. Job's heart was pure as far as he knew, and God even commended him before the trial began. But he still needed to see God. He still needed to be made pure.

A pure heart is one that is fixed only on the will of God for the glory of God. There is a lot in that – especially as it applies to the circumstances of life. But in the end that is what it comes down to.

So a Christian is NOT someone who belongs to the right religion. Rather, a Christian is someone who belongs to God – and has SEEN HIM.

The second thing a Christian is not is someone to whom God has simply handed everything – without any struggle, need to carry the Cross, or without any need for spiritual warfare. Today, we are being taught as never before that if you are in Christ that you have all that Christ has – indeed, some are even teaching that we are like a little Christ. This is terrible error. We are complete IN CHRIST, and everything IS finished, but it is only as we come UNDER Christ as Lord that anything can be released TO us, and THROUGH us. And only then, what is released will be only according to God's will and unto God's glory.

Christians need to get away from this popular notion that we POSSESS power. No. Actually, we are UNDER the power of Christ. Or, to put it another way, we don't possess power – power possesses US. If the Holy Spirit is in us, then the Holy Spirit has come UPON us, (see Acts 1:8-9) and that means that we are going to BECOME witnesses unto Christ. If the Holy Spirit is in us, the number one purpose of God is to bring every part of us under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Now, what we see in all of this is that a Christian is ANOTHER KIND of creature. Sure. We are new creations in Jesus Christ – we are not the same old creatures, only now stamped, "forgiven," or, "saved." Christianity is much more than that! No. We are new creations because we have received from above ANOTHER KIND OF LIFE – one that is not the product of this world, but one that is the product of death and resurrection. Christianity is CHRIST IN US – the hope of glory. This is not merely a legal classification, or a catchy phrase that describes a religion. It is God making Himself one with us.

Thus, as we move through Romans 8, we must recognize that Paul is not merely talking about legal or positional Truth, or merely spouting off about theology. He is describing life of a new order – he is trying to show us what happens when Jesus Christ makes Himself one with our Spirit – even though we continue to live in this fallen creation. He is describing the reality of being born again from above – and yet living as this new creature here below.

Now, having established all of this, we can turn to Romans 8. As mentioned earlier, it begins with a big THEREFORE.....

No Condemnation

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The reason (i.e., the THEREFORE) leading to this statement by Paul to the effect that there is NO CONDEMNATION, is found at the end of Romans 7:

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom 7:24-25)

Paul says that Jesus Christ has delivered him from the BODY OF DEATH. THAT IS WHY there is NO CONDEMNATION for those in Christ. But of course, we have to see why this is the case. WHY is someone in Christ Jesus NEVER condemned? How are we delivered from condemnation if we are delivered from the body of death?

To see this, we have to back up a step. First, let's look at the FACT that there is no condemnation. It is important to see this because some Christians don't believe that there is never any condemnation for those in Christ, and others certainly don't live out this Truth. So let's take Romans 8:1 and examine it by asking two questions: Do you believe that Paul means that there is no condemnation EVEN when we sin? Or do you believe that he means only that there is no condemnation EXCEPT when we sin?

Let's lay that out to make it more clear:

There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus EVEN when we sin.

OR

There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus EXCEPT when we sin.

There are really the only two possibilities. If Paul says that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, then his statement must apply to Christians EVEN when they sin, or it must apply EXCEPT when they sin. Which is it?

Remember, we are talking about those IN CHRIST JESUS – not about unsaved people. So what about it? Is there EVER condemnation for those in Christ?

Well, let's look at each option. Let's take the first one: Is there no condemnation EVEN when we sin, in other words, to put the question in a positive form, when I sin as a Christian, is there EVER condemnation upon me for my sin?

First of all, do we think that maybe Paul realized that Christians sin? John wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us." In fact, go back to Romans 6 and 7. Paul knows perfectly well that Christians sin. And yet he was able to write, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."

I think Paul meant what he said, don't you? He meant, "There is therefore now NO condemnation – ever – for anyone in Christ Jesus – EVEN when they sin." And if you wrap your mind around this Truth, it absolutely requires so much else to line up and harmonize. Indeed, it is a Truth that ought to set us free in so many ways.

Many Christians, however, do not believe this. They do believe there is condemnation for Christians when they sin. They believe that every time they sin, they are under condemnation – at least UNTIL they confess their sin and come under the Blood. They cite John's epistle, where he writes, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:9) The picture that these folks have is that every time we sin we are condemned – until we confess – and then we are once again forgiven.

There is a big problem with this interpretation. Do we realize what we are saying if we believe that we are condemned, or not forgiven, every time we sin – and that we stay that way until we confess? We are actually saying that every time we sin we lose our salvation – we are UNSAVED – until we confess and get saved all over again. That is exactly what we are saying.

Why do I say that? Because a Christian – a saved person – is a forgiven person. There isn't any OTHER KIND of Christian! There is no such thing as an unforgiven saved person, or a condemned saved person. Indeed, the very definition of a new creation in Christ Jesus is that they are forgiven forever, and free forever from condemnation.

Actually, John agrees. When John states, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins," the Greek tense, and the implication here is, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just TO HAVE FORGIVEN our sins." In other words, the reason we confess is not to GET FORGIVEN – for we are NOT temporarily unforgiven and condemned. No. We confess our sins because we know we ARE forgiven, and our confession is a matter of us exposing ourselves to the light, and declaring by faith the fact that we are! John states that if we say we have no sin, we are deceived – in other words, if we don't confess that we have sin. But he states that if we do confess our sins it is because we know the Truth – the Truth of the finality of the Cross of Jesus. Christians are forever forgiven and eternally secure in Him.

Christians are people whose sins are forever forgiven, but even more importantly, Christians are forgiven people. We must see this. Do we actually believe that every time we sin that we are no longer IN CHRIST – that is, until

we confess -- and then, and only then, are we back IN CHRIST – at least until next time we sin? If that is the case, then our salvation is based on our works – and not on God's grace.

Eternal Security

Eternal security IS the Truth. If there is NO condemnation for those in Christ, then there is no way to lose salvation for those in Christ. You cannot escape that conclusion. Eternal security is not only taught in the Bible a hundred different ways, but it clearly emerges from the words of Paul to the Romans. The fact is, if you can lose your salvation through works, then you must maintain it through works. And if you must maintain it through works, then since our works are imperfect, then every time we sin, we lose our salvation, and every time we confess we get it back. There really isn't any other way it could work if we can lose our salvation.

But note: If this is the case, then when we sin, we are unforgiven until we confess. Right? Sure – if we GET forgiven through confession. But is an unforgiven person saved? Not according to the Bible. That is why, according to some people's thinking, every time we sin we are temporarily unsaved. But ask: What happens if we DIE suddenly before we have a chance to confess? Do we go to hell? If we sin and don't confess, do we die UNFORGIVEN?

This whole notion that we can lose our salvation becomes nonsense if you really start thinking about it in the light of the Biblical revelation. For you cannot get around it – once you deny eternal security, you are left with YOU having to maintain your salvation through some means. And if that is the case, then it is possible for you to LOSE your salvation through some means. But if that is possible, then it is likewise possible, once you LOSE your salvation through those means, to get it back through those means. Sure. For once your salvation depends on your works, then you will be saved only when you obey, and unsaved when you fail.

This is actually what you end up with if you believe that when Paul said, "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus," that he meant that that there is no condemnation EXCEPT when we sin. Sure. In that case, if you obey, there is no condemnation. But if you sin, there IS condemnation. But again – if you are under condemnation you are UNSAVED. Thus, the issue becomes SALVATION ITSELF – rather than just some secondary classification before God due to my works.

Here we ought to look at the Galatians. The Galatians believed that they had to maintain their righteousness before God through doing good works. But can we see that behind this belief was really the notion that they had to maintain salvation itself through good works? Sure. The two teachings go together – the one naturally emerges from the other: If you believe you must maintain your righteous standing before God through the works of the law you also believe

that you must maintain your salvation through the works of the law – for your righteous standing before God IS your salvation! You cannot separate the two.

Once we see that this is what was going on in Galatia, it gives us a big insight into the Truth of eternal security, and shows us that there can never be any condemnation for those in Christ. Think about it. If Paul taught that you could lose your salvation, then why correct the Galatians? They were trying to establish their righteousness before God on the basis of works – and if you can lose your salvation, you had better do exactly that! How else would you establish your righteousness? Through works! But if Paul taught that you could NOT lose your salvation, then it makes perfect sense as to why he corrected them, and said to them:

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. "(Gal 5:1-5)

Paul is telling the Galatians that if they try to become justified – declared righteous – by law keeping, that Christ is of no effect to them. In other words, His death would not be needed, or have any impact for them. Neither would His life in them be needed. Why? Because THEY were accomplishing for themselves, through good works, what Christ had done for them. But Paul's correction would make no sense at all if you could lose your salvation. For if you can lose your salvation, then you had better maintain your salvation ***so you won't lose it*** – and this you must do through some form of works. But if eternal security is the Truth, then can we see that Paul's correction makes perfect sense – the Galatians were trying to make themselves secure through works, and this made Christ of no effect to them. They had bypassed Him and gotten off into error.

There are some other Christians who believe that you cannot lose your salvation through works, but that you can lose it by turning around and refusing to believe. In other words, if you were saved by faith, then why can't you lose your salvation by later choosing to NOT believe? Furthermore, doesn't the Bible show that this is possible, in places such as Hebrews 6 and 10?

First of all, I think that every place in the NT where it might seem that there is a description of how to lose your salvation – I think that many of these are descriptions, NOT of losing one's salvation, but of REFUSING salvation. If the only way to be saved is for God to first draw us to Christ, then this demands that an unsaved person first taste of the things of God, and have enough light – SO THAT they can embrace Jesus. That, in turn, means that they COULD refuse salvation once having tasted of the heavenly gift, and all those other things Hebrews describes. Sure. The same light God intends for you salvation, will condemn you if you refuse. This is why the Bible is able to talk about those, "once enlightened," and so forth, but who then turned away from Christ. They were never born again. Thus, they did not LOSE salvation. They REFUSED it.

There are other places in scripture that are often misunderstood to mean LOSING our salvation, but are actually describing the possibilities of losing our inheritance AS a saved person. Read I Cor. 3. There you will see that it is possible to lose EVERYTHING – but for you, yourself to still be saved.

Now, having said that, is it possible to stop believing AFTER you are saved, such that you lose your salvation? Well, if we are here talking about people that are TRULY CONVERTED – not those who are religious, or who have never repented – then the Bible says NO. You cannot lose your salvation.

But why? Don't we continue to have free will? Sure. But doesn't that mean we could choose to stop believing? Well, the question here isn't whether we have free will. Rather, the question is the meaning of true conversion, and the new birth. True conversion begins with the SURRENDER OF OUR WILLS to Christ. Surrender doesn't obliterate our free wills, of course – but surrender does make us forever submitted to Christ. My point is this: If we are truly converted, we GOT THAT WAY by surrendering our wills to Christ – indeed, we repented of NOT surrendering our wills to Christ. Therefore, if we are truly converted, we are not going to walk away from Christ. If we do, we are simply evidencing the fact that we were never truly converted in the first place.

The conversion to Christ that the Bible talks about is the RESULT and OUTCOME of repentance – it is the OUTCOME of settling every issue between yourself and God that might later have otherwise given you reason to renounce your faith. In effect, if you are still considering walking away from Christ, I'd question my conversion – because if you were truly converted, you would not consider renouncing Christ because that consideration was dealt with when you surrendered to Christ. You cannot have both – you cannot fully surrender to Christ resulting in salvation, but be carrying around the potential to renounce Him. It is a moral impossibility.

This does nothing to negate free will. What I'm saying is that in order to be saved, you have to surrender your will to Christ – and doing so is a free will surrender. Neither does it mean that our faith will not be tested, or that we will not pass through difficult times. We will experience all of those possibilities. But the question isn't whether we can lose salvation. John clearly states this in his epistle:

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother. (1 John 3:7-10)

The same apostle John who wrote the above passage, also states, in the same epistle, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us." So why does he now say, in the above passage, that, "he that commits sin is of the devil," and also, "whoever is born of God does not commit sin?" How do we explain this seeming contradiction?

In I John 3, when John says, "whoever is born of God does not commit sin," he is referring to the sin of unbelief – the sin of refusing Christ. THAT is the sin those born of God do not commit. Obviously, as we quoted from I John 1, John knows that born again believers DO COMMIT ACTS OF SIN! Thus, the sin here, in I John 3, is something else – and really the context tells us that it is. John gives us the reason why those born again do not commit the sin he is talking about in I John 3 – he says, "for His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." In other words, if you born again, the seed of God is always in you – Christ is always in you. Thus, having received Christ through repentance and the new birth, you aren't going to commit the ultimate sin of refusing Christ, for you have already repented of that possibility, and settled the issue. You are born again a new creation.

Can we see that if we are born again, we GOT THAT WAY by settling the possibility of refusing Christ – the fact we settled it is why we received Him?! Thus, it is finished. We are saved forever.

Of course, the reason some of us continue to think that salvation can be lost is that we don't understand what it is, or have a sense of what it means to have Christ in us. Thus, we take all of the scriptures on this matter and apply them to our faulty understanding of salvation, and end up completely off the track.

True conversion, by definition, cannot be lost, renounced, or walked away from. Why? Because it is a once for all repentance and surrender to Christ – sealed by the Holy Spirit – that births us as new creations. You cannot be born again backwards! You cannot, having become a new creation, be changed back into the old. You cannot pass from death to life, only to later pass from life to death. You cannot be raised from the dead in Christ only to be put back in Adam. It is impossible.

Now, of course, if your idea of conversion is simply, "getting religion," or changing your conduct, then you could lose THAT. If all you think it means to become a Christian is that you adopt a list of beliefs, then you can lose THAT. Or if you think that true conversion is a matter of sitting on the fence, and never really coming to the Cross, you can lose THAT. Indeed, many of these possibilities may reflect that a person HAS received light. But have they embraced Christ? Or are they, in fact, those that the Bible says are in danger of REFUSING salvation – but which many people think is a description of LOSING salvation?

If conversion were simply a matter of US making a decision for Christ, and needing to make sure we never take it back, then we might say we could lose

it. But despite the fact that we must indeed make a decision for Christ to be born again, once we do surrender to Christ, God seals us with the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is a supernatural element to salvation, that is wrought of God, that goes beyond the commitments of natural man. In short, if you could lose true salvation, then it wouldn't be newness of life, incorruptible, or Christ in you.

Now, I've gone through this entire issue of eternal security because it really speaks right to the point of whether a Christian can be under condemnation – even when we sin. Can we see that this is impossible? Can we see that if we are born again, we have already passed from death to life IN CHRIST – and that condemnation cannot be applied to us – even when we sin?

If condemnation were possible for those in Christ Jesus, then when would condemnation apply? Well, when we SIN! Sure. It certainly isn't going to apply when we OBEY! No. Condemnation would apply when we sin. But if condemnation does apply to the Christian when we sin, then when we sin, we LOSE our salvation – every single time we sin! Sure. For the very meaning of condemnation is that we have no salvation – that is WHY we are condemned. Thus, if condemnation is possible for those in Christ, then every single time you and I sin, in thought, word, or deed, we are condemned, unforgiven, and thus, we lose our salvation.

But then someone will say, "But if you confess your sins, God will forgive them." Ok. So in other words, if I sin, I am condemned and have lost my salvation, but then if I confess, and put my faith in the Blood, I get my salvation restored? Is that how salvation works? Well, if that were the case, then I must pass from death to life and life back to death, over and over, every time I sin, and confess, etc. Nothing is finished. Indeed, the new birth, in that case, is nothing but a fake label – for if I can bounce back and forth in and out of salvation, then I am never really born again a new creation. I have to keep being reborn again, unborn, and reborn – based on my works and my faith.

As I stated earlier, a truly converted person WILL confess their sins, precisely because they know that they are forgiven. What else would we do if we have the Truth in us? We would tell the Truth about our sins, which is exactly what it means to confess them.

Go back to Romans 6 again, and note the once for all, and finality of how Paul describes conversion. There Paul says:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed,

that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 6:3-11)

Christianity is not merely a legal classification. It is not a religion we adopt. It is a new birth as a new creation who is ONE WITH CHRIST. It is new life – and you cannot bounce in and out of new life based on works. Sure, you might not act like a new creation. You might have issues of unbelief. And you can lose your inheritance, despite still being saved. But salvation is forever, sealed in the Blood of the Lamb.

So let's get back to the original questions: Is there NO condemnation EVEN when we sin, or EXCEPT when we sin? Hopefully, we have seen that there is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus **EVEN when we sin**. For if there is NO condemnation EXCEPT when we sin, then there **is** condemnation, period! – for when else WOULD we be condemned?

Paul has already explained in Romans 6 that Christians must not sin because they know that grace nevertheless will abound – Christians must not use the fact that condemnation is not possible as a license. Can we see how Romans 6:1 and Roman 8:1 are both predicated on the same Truth that in Christ we are saved forever and cannot be condemned? Sure. There is NO condemnation, under any circumstances, for a Christian. But now Paul is going to explain further **why** there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

The Law of the Spirit of Life

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)

There is no condemnation for those in Christ -- BECAUSE the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death. This shows that the law of sin and death is what brings the condemnation. Then Paul tells us that all of this is based on the finished work of Redemption completed by Jesus Christ.

So what we need to understand is the meaning of what Paul calls, "the law of sin and death," and, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

As I mentioned in Romans 7, there are two, "laws," Paul talks about in these chapters, aside from the actual law of God. But these two, "laws," are not a list of **rules**. No. Rather, these two, "laws," actually speak of two NATURES – the law of sin and death, and the law of the Spirit of life. Each one of these two

laws is really reflective of two kinds of NATURES in two kinds of creatures – Adam, and Christ.

The old creation IN ADAM has a nature – the law of sin and death. Some call it the sin nature. Paul calls it the law of sin and death – it is simply the nature of sin and death that is in the old creation.

The law of sin and death is the result of two things: First, the fact that in Adam there is no life. But second, the fact that Adam is in bondage to the realm of darkness. Colossians 1:13 says that Jesus has delivered us from the realm of darkness. Thus, this means we NEED delivered from it, that is, we are in bondage to it.

It is because we have no life in us, and are in bondage to darkness, that there is a law of sin and death. In other words, the law of sin and death speaks of how the natural man, void of life in Christ, operates. It speaks of his nature. We are absolutely in the grip of darkness, sin, and the natural. We cannot receive the things of God. And unless God initiates to bring light, we have no escape.

A person who continues to be bound by the law of sin and death can be a religious person. They can be an intelligent person. They can be a nice person. It's just that all they have to call upon to interpret life, and interpret God, is their natural resources. Some people can get along quite comfortably within their natural resources, of brains, emotions, and talents. Other cannot. But in the end, all are blind unless they SEE JESUS.

The law of sin and death works in a person if that person has no life in them – it really controls them in the sense that, yes, they have a free will. But it is a free will governed by blindness and self-centeredness. So they will choose in accordance within that. A slave has a free will. They might even WILL to be free. But the reality is, they ARE a slave, and don't know what it really is to be free. They will DO what they ARE. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Its nature is that it can produce only bad fruit. That is the LAW of its nature – in this case, the nature of sin and death.

There are many illustrations we could give as to how this law of sin and death operates. One of the main ways is through emotions. If you don't know God, or see Jesus, you are going to live, to a greater or lesser degree, by your emotions. For some, what they feel is the Truth will be the Truth to them. Another way is to live in accordance to logic and brains. Truth cannot be apprehended by logic. Of course, since Truth IS logical – there is no contradiction within it – it can be EXPLAINED logically once received through revelation of Christ. But you cannot GET Truth through a logical process because you will only have limited perspective, and much of that in error. There are lots of smart people, some of whom are Christians, who are deceived. The problem isn't their brain power. The problem is that they don't see Jesus, and the law of the Spirit of life has not set them free from the law of sin and death.

So again we see that the law of sin and death is not only our SINS. No. This is about our NATURE – it is about the KIND of creature we are in Adam, through natural birth. Bound up in this are darkness, unbelief, ignorance, and really, the SELF-principle, which is the flesh. We are talking here about what man became when Adam declared his independence from God. When Adam died, he lost the life of God. The law of sin and death describes what a man IS, and how he operates, void of the life of God. He is under the law of sin and death – he sins and he is spiritually dead. That is ALL HE CAN DO. The law of sin and death will continue to operate in him, because that is his nature. The only solution is DEATH to the old nature, and then RESURRECTION in Christ. Then the life of God is restored in such a one.

The law, or nature, of the Spirit of life in Christ, is resurrection life. It is a new law, or nature, that belongs to the new creation. This law is, in fact, Christ in us, the hope of glory. It is how the Holy Spirit functions in a human being.

So immediately, we see that the reason that, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ," sets us free from, "the law of sin and death" -- it is because it is a NEW NATURE – it is because we are born again from above. The old is passed away – the power of it is broken. And within us, we have Christ. This is why John was able to write:

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Christ in us is greater than the old realm and old nature – or, if you will – the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is greater than the law of sin and death. Resurrection life in Christ sets us free from that old law.

Now don't misunderstand. Despite the reality of our new nature through Christ, this freedom doesn't, "just happen." It has to be worked out, realized, experienced, and walked in. The way this is made possible is through the work of the Cross – which is really another way of saying that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ will bring DEATH through the power of the Cross upon the old in us, so that the life of Christ might be released and experienced. In other words, you have to carry your cross so that what is already finished for you through Christ's Cross might come into your actual experience, rather than just remain a finished work, "on paper."

Never think of Christian growth as God ADDING to us more of Christ, or ADDING to us something in addition to Christ. No. We are complete in Christ – see Col. 2:9-10. But the flesh and the old ways of thinking are in the way – indeed self-will and unbelief are in the way -- keeping us from living in our inheritance. So God must deal with us. As He deals with the flesh, Christ is not added to us, but the Christ who is already fully in us is released. We die, but He lives more through us.

Here we see the key to, "fullness in the Spirit." It's the key to a tremendous release of Christ in us through the Holy Spirit. And what is that key? Not a, "second blessing," or, "second baptism." No. The key is that Jesus Christ might become LORD – really, not just in theory. God must deal with our flesh, and if He does through the Cross, Jesus will become our personal Lord in practice and experience. What was true doctrine will become freedom in our experience. Only when Jesus is Lord, is fullness of the Spirit possible.

Christ is in us through the new birth. But despite having ALL of Christ, and consequently, ALL that God has for us – because all that God has for us is IN HIM – we don't yet experience all that is of Christ. We cannot. For that, we must continually believe, obey, and most importantly, lose our lives for His sake, that we might find our lives IN HIM. Indeed, the moment we turn to God and lose our lives in a matter, the resurrection power of Christ is there, because we have, in a sense, died. That is the initial practical work of the Cross, and really, is of this same law of Spirit of life in Christ pushing through to crucify the flesh. Christ emerges – the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is His resurrection life being made manifest in power and authority over all of that old creation.

This is what Paul was saying in Galatians:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

The Power Who IS Christ

Remember again that through the new birth the presence and possibility of sin remain. But the POWER of sin is broken through death and resurrection. The fact that the presence and possibility remain is what Paul talks about in Romans 7. He shows that within the Christian there are really two natures – the old and the new. There is the law of sin and death. And there is the law of the Spirit of life. This is why there is warfare – we have two natures. And yet because, "greater is He that is in us," if we continually turn to God and lose our lives for His sake – lose our possession of our lives over to Him – resurrection life in Christ rises up because in Christ we are already more than conquerors.

If we are in Christ, then we are new creations, and as new creations, we have a different KIND OF LIFE – life that is not able to be governed by the law of sin and death – we have resurrection life in Christ. Thus, "the law," of resurrection life is that it has victory over death. That is the KIND OF LIFE resurrection life is. That is how it functions. Indeed, resurrection life sets us free from the law of sin and death.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ is RESURRECTION POWER IN US – to push through all that the law of sin and death would bring. As such, it is more than just an intellectual understanding of this doctrine. It is not an emotional

condition. No. At some point in our growth, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ actually is power to live ABOVE those terrible conditions in our flesh that give place to condemnation, dread, despair – all the things of death.

Death is separation from God. Even as a Christian, it is possible to have unresolved patterns in us whereby our flesh reacts to situations in a way that makes it seem like we are separated from God. It's not something we try to do, or want to do – indeed, we probably hate it, and sometimes even despair over the fact that this happens. But this is the law of sin and death operating in our members. Yet the more we submit to God despite these failings, the more resurrection life in Christ is able to be enlarged and released in us, until the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus becomes powerful enough in us to expose and dismantle this law of sin and death.

So one way to describe how the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death is that if we yield to Christ by faith, there is a power that rises up in us that dismantles all that would otherwise seem to come between us and God. Those terrible feelings, that condemnation and guilt, that sense of defeat and despair – all of those things are the things of death because they are what come when we believe we are separated from God. But the law of the Spirit of life is resurrection power IN US that is able to push through all of that and expose these things as lies, and give us power to live in victory.

One other way in which the law of the Spirit of life sets us free is that it gives us power NOT to be governed by circumstances. At one time, we might have reacted towards circumstances in a way that would not be faith. But the law of the Spirit will DETACH us from circumstances and give us power to walk by faith despite all that might be around us.

Now note again: The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus does not necessarily make the law of sin and death go away. No. As Paul teaches in Romans 7, the flesh is always present, and it is always possible to sin. The POWER of sin is broken, but not the presence or possibility. But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ sets us free of the government of the flesh, and gives us power to rise above it – if we will lose our lives into His hands. Our death in that way results in a release of the resurrection power of Christ in us.

The reason behind our victory is HIS victory. Christ has already conquered all of the things of death. Therefore, the key to our victory OVER those things in ourselves, is to come UNDER Him as Lord. We must abandon ourselves to Him. If we do, then we will reign and rule with Him in actual experience. Our death through losing our lives will result in Christ being enlarged and released in us. The power will then be THERE in us.

This power is not a THING. It is a PERSON. Christ is the power of God. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Thus, the more we live in harmony

with Him, the more His resurrection life flows through us. And the result is victory over all the things of death.

The key here is not some gimmick of mind or emotion. It is not some psychological game we play on ourselves. This is not about figuring out some effective emotional or intellectual angle I can work against the law of sin and death. Neither is it about needing to, "get delivered." No. This is about coming under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to the point where His resurrection power has freedom to work in me.

It is a fact: To the extent that I am submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, I will have power IN CHRIST. To the extent that I am dead to my own will and agenda, I will have power IN CHRIST. I'm not talking about power to do miracles, etc. I'm talking about power to live in Christ in victory over all the things of sin and death. I cannot have power over death unless I am dead in Christ to myself, and then have been raised with Him.

Today false teachers are telling us that power is a THING that God gives us in the form of an anointing, or a second experience after salvation. No. Christ Himself – His life in us -- is the power of God through the Holy Spirit. The more you come under His Lordship on a day to day basis, the more you reign and rule with Him – not just legally, or positionally, but in POWER.

The hindrance to power in the Christian life is US – our unbelief, our self-will, and our flesh. The law of sin and death continues to operate in us in so many ways. As I have said, the solution is to lose our lives for His sake. But what do I mean by that?

Basically, we have to turn to God and say to Him, "Whatever it takes Lord, for you to get your will IN ME – do it." Or, we might say, we have to lose our right to possess our lives for ourselves, and give ourselves unconditionally to God. The moment we turn to the Lord in that way, the resurrection power of Christ is there. And then when God does what He knows it takes to deal with us, then we submit to Him in it. We have to, "present our bodies, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." (see Romans 12:1-2) In faith – not as a religious gimmick or angle I'm working with God – I have to give myself to God so that He can have full freedom to do IN ME what is necessary to enlarge in me the resurrection life of Christ.

Of course God will have to bring DEATH to whatever in me gives place to unbelief, etc. But really, what we are really talking about here is God doing whatever it takes to establish me in a relationship with Him – with Jesus as Lord. That means I'm no longer my own lord.

We are being told in these incredible chapters of Romans that IN CHRIST we have victory over all sin and death. We are raised IN HIM – and every part of His victory is truly ours. But likewise, we are being told, that in order for this victory to come into our actual experience, we must submit to Him as our

personal Lord. We must LOSE our lives to Him. You can only reign and rule with Christ in your actual experience if He is reigning and ruling over you in actual experience. It is a life principle.

So, in short, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is resurrection life in Christ – it is the nature of resurrection life. And the nature of resurrection life is that it has victory and power over all the law of sin and death. Thus, Paul is able to say, "There is no condemnation for those in Christ, because the resurrection life of Christ has set me free from all of the nature of sin and death. I am free from death through His resurrection." Paul is talking about more than a doctrinal Truth. He is talking about a reality that is to be experienced. Really, he is talking about what Christianity IS.

How We Walk

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Having just told us that we are set free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life, Paul elaborates. He wants to make us to understand the dynamics of each of these natures, and how we are set free.

The first thing Paul says is that the law could not accomplish the will of God. Why? Because of our weakness of the flesh. In other words, despite the holiness of the law, we are not holy. A holy law cannot impart unto you the life or power to obey it. And you cannot OBEY YOUR WAY into freedom from sin – because you are spiritually dead. Rather, as we have seen, the law – because it is holy – ends up condemning you. So for God to accomplish in man what He wanted, there had to be another way. That other way was to make of us a new creation in Christ Jesus.

You will note that the basis for everything Paul is about to teach takes us back to Romans 6. There we saw that we are dead to sin and alive to God. There we saw that we are both crucified and raised with Christ. The law cannot do this. As Paul said to the Galatians:

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. (Gal. 6:14-15)

Christianity is not defined by keeping God's law. Indeed, all obedience in the Christian life – real obedience from the heart – is the result of first being rightly related to God by faith. Obedience is not the MEANS to being rightly related to God. Nope. Faith is a relationship word, and if we get rightly related to God by faith, we will WANT to obey.

If we realize that fact, we will also realize that we really cannot keep God's law. Are we convinced of that yet? Well, once we are, we will see that the only hope is that we become born again. A new birth as a new creature MAKES us what the law cannot make us. We are, in Christ, what we could never be trying to keep the law. And as for law keeping, it will be the OUTCOME – not the means thereunto – of being in Christ.

Once we begin to understand the Truth on this matter, eternal security is settled as a fact. Furthermore, there emerges the realization that God is doing something in us that will fully glorify Himself and accomplish His will – through Christ.

Also notice that the death and resurrection of Christ did IN US what the law could not do IN US. Our death and resurrection in Christ fulfilled the just requirement of the law IN US.

How so? Well, don't think only of the LEGAL aspect of redemption. The doctrine of justification by faith rightly describes that legal aspect – if we believe, God imputes to us the righteousness of Christ, and imputes to Christ our sin. Sure. But Christianity is more than a legal position. It is a living union with Christ. Thus, when Paul says that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled IN US, he means exactly that. In short, God not only IMPUTES to us the righteousness of Christ legally, but He IMPARTS to us Christ Himself – Christ in us is our righteousness.

But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glories, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:30-31)

God doesn't merely IMPUTE to us righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. No. Christ in us IS those realities. Through death and resurrection in Christ, we are IMPARTED with the very life of Christ – and He IS those things in and through us. This is what it means to be ONE with Christ as a new creature. It is what Paul means when he says that Christ in us is the fulfillment of the righteousness of God.

Now all of this is why it is possible to walk after the Spirit – we have the Spirit of Christ in us. It is also why we are freed from the power of the flesh. Christ is in us. Of course, you have to turn to Christ and make choices of faith, but Christ is already in you. And through His finished work we share in His victory.

Flesh and Spirit

In the above passage, Paul begins to contrast the FLESH over and against the SPIRIT. This will be important to grasp if we are to understand the chapter. But first, we need to know some basics. For example, we must see that if we are born again, we are not IN THE FLESH. Rather, we are IN THE SPIRIT. That is a

fact, regardless of how we live. Paul will say this later in chapter 8. This also gets back to what Paul teaches in Romans 6. Through Christ, we are already delivered from the POWER of sin – from the power of the old creation. If we are IN CHRIST, we **are** IN THE SPIRIT.

However, we have already seen that we are not delivered from the presence or possibility of the flesh. Thus, despite being IN THE SPIRIT, and not IN THE FLESH, it is nevertheless possible to walk ACCORDING TO THE FLESH. We see examples of Christians doing this all through the NT.

But what does that mean – what does it mean to walk according to the flesh? Well, first we have to understand what the Bible means by the term, "the flesh." "The flesh," is essentially the SELF principle. It surely includes all of the immoral possibilities that we usually think of when we think of the word, "flesh." But THE FLESH is really a matter of me owning myself -- running my own life – it is ME as the center of the universe. Thus, it is possible to walk according to the flesh and do it quite religiously. Just use the things of God for your own purposes, and you are walking according to the flesh.

Another way of describing the flesh is to call it the sin nature. If I walk according to the sin nature, I am walking according to the flesh. But again -- don't just think of sinning -- for the flesh is the SELF. The flesh is the sin nature's pension for running one's own life. So, "to walk according to the flesh," is to walk according to what I see, what I feel, what I want – and it is possible to do some nice things under that motivation. A person who is NOT born again will walk according to the flesh because that is ALL HE HAS TO WORK WITH. He has only the SELF principle – and will serve it without even knowing what he is doing. It comes natural.

If just take Paul's words as a child, it becomes clear as to what he means when he says that we are to WALK AFTER THE SPIRIT. This is not just a matter of LEADINGS – although God can and does lead people. And while to WALK AFTER THE SPIRIT would include obedience, faith, and everything else that is of God – to walk AFTER the Spirit really speaks of an overall basis for living. It means to walk as if we belong to God – we walk GOVERNED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. I am living on the basis of a new relationship with Christ – as one who has passed from death to life.

Perhaps one of the best summaries of what it means to walk after the Spirit are the words of Jesus from the sermon on the mount. The entire sermon is a description of what it means to walk after the Spirit. But all of the teaching in that sermon could perhaps be gathered up into one verse:

But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matt. 6:33)

Here we see how a new creation in Christ Jesus, who is living on an entirely different basis, will live and function. It is both spiritual and practical. We will

live IN this world, but not be OF this world. We won't live with the motivation of the world, or be governed by SELF. Rather, we will seek God's will, indeed, seek God Himself. And if we do, all the rest of what we need will be provided, within God's present purpose and methods.

Again – and this cannot be overemphasized – a saved person is a DIFFERENT KIND of creature than a natural man. As a result, this, "different kind of creature," lives according to a different kind of INNER GOVERNMENT. Fundamental to this new government is victory over the old government of the flesh, and victory over sin and death. On a more positive note, fundamental this new kind of creature is the fact that his perspective, motivation, and really, his entire being, has come under this government of resurrection life.

You will note that it takes TIME and EXPERIENCE for there to be a change in government. This does not, however, mean that the change OF government is progressive – no, for we are born again all at once. But just as a conquered nation must be progressively brought under the government of the conquering nation, so it is with us. Thus, we are a new creation – a different creature – under a new government, the kingdom of God. But we have to learn how to LIVE like it.

Jesus command to SEEK FIRST the kingdom of God – the governing of Christ within over us – is about the most basic statement that could be made about the new life in its practical outworking. The new creation in Christ is to seek God's will, God's rule, indeed, God Himself, in ALL THINGS. We are, if you will, to BECOME expressions of God's kingdom through Christ in us by the Spirit. And if we are in that process – and it is a process – Jesus says that we are then living on the basis of the Spirit – we are walking according to the Spirit. And everything we need will be added to us that is needed for God's will in practical living.

Thus, to walk AFTER the Spirit, means to live on another basis – the basis of Jesus as Lord and God's will – not just with regards to works, but really, with regards to our whole being. In short, to walk AFTER the Spirit means that I am fully in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and have opened myself to God for whatever it takes for Him to make me into an expression of the life of Christ. This is what it means to SEEK FIRST the kingdom or rule of God.

Of course, this also tells us what it means to walk AFTER the flesh. It means NONE of the above, but more, it means to be governed by SELF. It means to live for this life, with only the perspective of this life. You cannot SEE the kingdom of God unless you are born again. It doesn't matter how hard you try – and it doesn't matter how many doctrines you know. You cannot SEE.

The Mind or Intent

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Paul says that they that are, "after the flesh," which means, "walking according to the flesh," he says that they do MIND the things of the flesh. This also means that if you mind the things of the flesh, you are at that point, "walking according to the flesh." The same goes for the Spirit. The word, "mind," here speaks of goal or intent. You, "mind," something when you live for it, and when it governs you.

Here again we are reminded of Jesus' command to seek first the kingdom of God. To SEEK is to MIND. It is the goal upon which your mind, or will, is centered. For what do we live?

If you read this passage, you will see that Paul is once again assuring us that there IS a battle here – even though Christ has already won all victory. But IN US this victory has to be made manifest. And IN US there continues to exist flesh – in which functions the law of sin and death. So even though the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has victory over the law of sin and death, that victory needs to be worked out to God's glory in our being.

Note also this point: Paul says that the carnal mind is at enmity against God. It CANNOT be subject to God's law. In other words, you must be born again. Law keeping won't do. But as Paul continually asks the Galatians, once you are born again, why are you trying to maintain your salvation and righteousness through law-keeping? This is futile. Christ is already the fulfillment of the requirement of the law IN YOU. Walk in the Spirit – seek first God's rule and kingdom. If you do, obedience will result. You are married to another and you will bear fruit unto God.

To walk after the Spirit will not result in license. Paul covered this whole thing in Romans 6. But your obedience won't be your attempt to maintain your salvation, or establish your righteousness. Rather, it will be the OUTCOME of Christ in you.

To be, "carnally minded," means to think in temporal terms, rather than spiritual terms – really, it means to live for the temporal. It is DEATH because the carnal mind is void of light and Truth, and cannot, while a person is still unsaved, be renewed according to the Truth.

The person who is carnally minded usually doesn't know it. Many professing Christians are carnally minded. They live in a box framed by their ignorance, but they think they know. Because the perspective of the carnal mind is ALL

THEY HAVE EVER KNOWN, they think that it is all there is. Add a little religion and self-righteousness, and they can even think that what they know is the Truth.

There is no escape from this condition except the new birth. Regeneration does not precede faith – this is the error of Calvinism. But once God initiates and brings light to a darkened man, that man has enough to turn to Christ while still unsaved. If he does, then he will be born again, and begin to SEE the kingdom of God. He will begin to know Christ. Part of this process will be that the person will begin to see how deceived he has been, and how blind he has been to the Truth. There will be an on-going conviction upon us for our unbelief. But as we walk with Christ in the Spirit, our mind will be renewed according to the Truth – in short, we will begin to see that what God says is true IS true.

It is here that we must make comment on the phrase, "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Christians, by definition, are not IN the flesh – Paul says, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." Yet Paul also knows that it is still possible for a Christian, despite being IN the Spirit, to walk AFTER the flesh. And if Christians DO walk after the flesh, the principle applies: You cannot please God.

One of the more common ways in which professing Christians walk AFTER the flesh is by trying to make our emotions obey God – we try to create an emotional condition we think will PLEASE God and impress Him; convince Him we are righteous. Or we try to make our emotions believe. This is futile. Our emotions cannot believe. Emotions REACT. And they are often great liars. Thus, if I continually examine my emotions to see if I have faith, or to affirm that God is true, I am really walking after the flesh. I am on a completely wrong basis.

Do you find yourself turning inward and calculating how you feel about something, and then on the basis of that, establishing the Truth? Or establishing God's will? This is not what it means to walk after the Spirit – but really is what it means to walk after the flesh. I am using ME to determine Truth.

There is no capacity in the flesh, in the emotions, or in the natural mind to know God or walk with God. Sure, we can memorize doctrines and alter lifestyles religiously. But that is not walking after the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit requires the receiving of a new life – from the outside of us, into us – through death and resurrection. It requires that I be born again FROM ABOVE. And even then it takes time to learn how to walk after the Spirit, rather than just continue in the old patterns of the flesh.

If all of this happened automatically, such that being born again automatically made all these things happen without our knowledge, obedience, faith, and walk with God, then Paul would not need to write these epistles. But the fact

that we have all this teaching proves that we need it. We are being told how God works – we are being taught the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit is Life

But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you.

There is a lot of Truth in this passage. Right off the bat, we see once again that if you are saved, you are not IN the flesh, but IN the Spirit. You ARE a new creation, born of the Spirit. That is your identity. You simply need to learn how to walk AFTER the Spirit.

Then Paul says, "If any one does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." In other words, if you DO have the Spirit of Christ, you DO belong to Him. And belonging to Christ through the Spirit has a great ramification: Your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Paul is obviously talking about the essence of salvation. If Christ is in you through the Holy Spirit, you are saved. If He is not in you, you are not saved. You do not belong to Him.

Now, just as an aside, can we see that there is no room in any of this for the necessity of a second blessing in addition to Christ – such as is taught by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Paul says that if you have the Spirit in you, that you belong to Christ – that you are IN THE SPIRIT. And everything else that he is going to teach is built upon that basis. There is not another baptism with the Holy Spirit except the ONE and ONLY that is our salvation. When we receive Christ, we receive the fullness of God.

Incidentally, if you want a definition, right from Paul, of what it means to be IN THE SPIRIT, we have it right here. Paul says, "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." In other words, if the Spirit dwells in you, you are in the Spirit – and thus, if the Spirit dwells in you, you are saved. Thus, to be in the Spirit is NOT made possible through some second blessing or baptism. No. To be in the Spirit is synonymous with Christ in us – with salvation.

Paul said to the Colossians, "You are complete in Christ." (see Col. 2:10) The literal meaning is, "you are filled to the full in Christ." When we receive Christ, we receive all that God has for us. There could be no more of a basic Truth

than that. And yet millions believe that you can have Christ in you, yet lack most of what God wants you to have, because you have NOT received a second blessing that they say is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

But this is not the Truth. And we see indications of that here, in this passage. Notice, for example, the different terms Paul uses in the above passage for the same indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit:

In the Spirit

The Spirit of God that dwells in you.

The Spirit of Christ

Christ in you

. The Spirit of him that raised up Jesus

His (the Father's) Spirit that dwells in you

All of these are the SAME indwelling, through the SAME salvation experience. They are all descriptions of Christ in us through the Holy Spirit – made possible through the ONE and ONLY baptism with the Holy Spirit unto salvation.

Moving forward, Paul states that the impact of CHRIST IN US is that, "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness." This is really a repeat of what Paul said in Romans 6:

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (Rom 6:5-8)

If Christ is in us, we have been crucified with Him, and been raised in Him. Not just legally, but REALLY. And this will mean that the power of sin is broken in our lives. And since the power of sin – the law of sin and death – operates in the body or flesh, then it means that if Christ is in us, our body is dead TO sin, and our spirit is alive to righteousness.

Can we wrap our minds around this great Truth? "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Can we see that CHRIST IN US is supposed to be REAL? This is not about religion. It is not about believing doctrines – although the doctrines will tell us the Truth about it all. Rather, it is about actually becoming one with Christ in His death and resurrection. If we do, our body is dead because of sin – this has no power over us – but we are raised with Christ.

Paul is trying to tell us that it is futile to try to make a dead body obey God. He is trying to tell us that a dead body cannot make us obey IT. No. We are raised up out of all of that as a new creation in Christ. Paul is saying, "This is the Truth. Walk alive to righteousness."

Paul never tells us to settle for defeat – although defeat will be the case along the way, as we must learn how NOT to walk. But Paul holds out the hope of actually walking in the Spirit. He says, "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you." In other words, at some point, if Christ is in us, our outward life will reflect it. Victory won't begin in the outward, but it will eventually be reflected in the outward. Even our mortal bodies will, as we believe and obey, come under the new government that is in us. And ultimately, at the resurrection, we will be changed fully.

No Longer Debtors

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

A DEBTOR is someone obligated – in this case, to the flesh. In other words, before we were saved, we WERE in bondage to the flesh. This could only result in death. But after being saved, we are no longer debtors – showing that we really are set free from the power of sin; from the obligation to obey the flesh.

Paul says that we need to MORTIFY the deeds of the body. The word, "mortify," means, "to destroy by neglect." WE need to do this, BY the Spirit. In other words, we need to make the choice to obey God in a positive, pro-active manner, but part of this will, by default, mean that we must leave aside the flesh. Because of Christ in us, we have the power to do this.

At the end of the above passage, we have this often misunderstood verse: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Millions believe that Paul is here talking about LEADINGS of the Spirit to do this or that, or go here or there. Many even teach that if you do have such LEADINGS, that this is evidence that you are a son of God – for they say that Paul is saying that those who are led of God are the sons of God. But this is wrong. The context of the passage has very little to do with LEADINGS.

If you read that verse in context, you discover that Paul is not talking about LEADINGS. He is talking about whether you are GOVERNED by the Spirit. Indeed, the Greek word translated, "led," in this verse means, "to be

governed." Paul is saying that if you are a son of God, that this will be evidence by the fact that you are GOVERNED by the Holy Spirit.

There is a big difference between being LED by the Spirit and being GOVERNED by the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit requires only that God tell me to do something, or lead me somewhere into something, and that is it. But to be GOVERNED by the Spirit speaks again of the government under which I am living. And if you read the passage, you will find that Paul is talking about being GOVERNED by either the flesh, or by the Spirit.

Essential to the definition of a son of God is that they have the Spirit of God IN THEM, and they are more and more living in freedom from the government of the flesh, and more and more under the government of the Spirit. In short, a son of God is defined by the fact that Jesus Christ is their Lord – not just in fact, but in practice. This is what it means to be GOVERNED by the Holy Spirit – to be living in His will to His glory.

God can and does LEAD His people. But it is entirely possible to be LED by God, and yet to not be GOVERNED by Him. God is merciful. But He wants us governed by Christ in us.

So the whole point being made by Paul is not that God will LEAD us. It is that God wants to GOVERN us – and that if we are sons of God we will be more and more coming under the Holy Spirit unto that end.

The Spirit of Adoption

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Rom 8:14-17)

If you ever feel as if you are cut off from God, this is a good verse to turn to. It shows that we are sons of God. God cannot disown his own children. Furthermore, this is just another verse that shows the nonsense of saying we can lose our salvation – provided we really are born again. We are of an entirely different spirit – not that of fear – but that of adoption.

The born again believer, as already noted, is a different kind of creature, or human being. He is ONE WITH CHRIST. He is a son or daughter of God because Jesus is THE Son of God, and we are IN HIM. In fact, this reality is supposed to grow to become so real that the PROOF of it is that, "the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Do we realize what this means? It means that life in Christ is supposed to be so real in us that Christ in us is a witness, or testimony to us, of the Truth that we belong to God.

How many of us have that kind of witness within? Or how many of us think that the proof of Christianity is, for instance, the Bible? Well, the Bible isn't the ultimate proof of Christianity – and actually the Bible itself is telling us that right here in Romans. Paul does not say that, "scripture bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God." No, despite the fact that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Rather, the Bible describes what conversion is, how to be converted, and tells us the nature and character of Christ in us. But you could actually memorize all of these points and NOT be converted! No. The Bible tells us that the Spirit WITHIN US is the witness! The real PROOF of Christianity is Christ in us. Scripture does fully support this reality, but the written Word is not the reality Himself, who is the Living Word.

John agrees with Paul completely on this point:

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself: he that believes not God hath made him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record that God has given to us: eternal life. And this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:9-11)

Christ in us IS Christianity, and thus, Christ in us is the PROOF, testimony, or record, of the Truth of Christianity. Does this not tell us a little about how real and life-changing Christ in us is supposed to be? Sure. Paul is trying to tell us that all through these last couple of chapters. He is telling us that Christ in us through the Spirit will not only make us a different kind of creature, but we will be walking according to an entirely different government.

But this won't be easy. The flesh usually doesn't go quietly. That is why Paul goes on to build upon the fact that we are children of God by saying, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; **if so be that we suffer with him**, that we may be also glorified together."

This is a passage that is often meant to mean that because Christ has all victory, that we automatically have all victory. From this come such errors as, "Word of Faith," "Dominion Theology," and the authority of the believer. Well, potentially it is true that we do have all the victory that Christ has. But just go out and try to exercise all victory. You won't last five minutes. And neither would those who teach this error.

You will notice the big, "IF," in this passage. Everything we share with Christ as coheirs with Him is contingent upon one thing: "If we suffer WITH Him." What this means is that in order for the victory of Christ to be possible for us to possess, Christ has to possess US. As noted before, we have the authority OF Christ only to the extent that Christ has authority over us. The potential must become actual in the form of a relationship between us and Jesus.

This ought not to be surprising. Do we actually think that we can reign and rule WITH Christ over anything, if Christ isn't reigning and ruling over us? Hardly. Here again we see that authority isn't a THING or a POSITION that God simply hands out as a gift. No. All authority is IN CHRIST – and the only way to operate in His authority is by coming under Him.

Actually, there is no authority handed to any of us as independent creatures. No. We have authority only IN CHRIST – as the outcome of our oneness and submission to Him. We are sons and daughters of God only because we are IN HIM, and heirs of God only because we are IN HIM, and have authority only because we are IN HIM. There is nothing given us that is not the result of our association and oneness with Him.

For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)

To suffer WITH Christ is necessary because it is through that suffering that we do lose our life, and our control and authority over it, into His hands as our Lord. We must become so totally abandoned to Christ that God is able to do whatever it pleases Him to do in us, to accomplish His will, and glorify Himself. If I am to be changed inwardly, to one who is governed by the SELF principle, or flesh, over to one governed by Christ, suffering will be necessary. But it will be suffering WITH Christ – I will suffer as He comes to govern me, for my flesh won't like this.

Now, if you read the above passage in context, you do begin to understand that when Paul talks about reigning and ruling with Christ, that he is certainly speaking about reigning and ruling ***by the Spirit of life OVER the flesh***. This is where the battle begins and must be established. Those who are the sons of God are governed by the Spirit of God – and if we are governed by the Spirit, we are set free from the government of the flesh.

The way in which we overcome the flesh and walk in Christ by the spirit begin with faith. But then we must turn from ourselves and abide in Christ. In Christ we have all of the resurrection power of new life at our disposal. Thus, to the extent that we believe and abide there is going to be victory. The old nature will be proven impotent against us – to the extent we abide in Christ.

The Glory to Be

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Paul has just said that if we want to reign with Christ – live in our inheritance – we must come UNDER Christ. That will mean suffering in the flesh. But now he tells us about the other side of this Truth. He tells us that all the suffering of this present time isn't worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Now, note two things. First of all, Paul is contrasting the sufferings of THIS PRESENT TIME to the glory of the eternal ages. There is, to a much less extent, a glory that is revealed to us in this present time as well. But nothing compared to what will be.

Can we see a relationship here between what God is doing in our lives NOW, and what will be released THEN? Can we see that God is actually preparing His people – those who will yield – to reign and rule with Him, and to experience His glory? Sure. This life is about being prepared for the next. That is why we must lose our lives to find them in Christ. And that is why God always works toward eternal ends, and beckons us to do the same.

The second thing to note is that there is a glory to be revealed IN US. Get that: Not just a glory to be revealed TO US – although that is certain as well. But a glory to be revealed IN US. This is not OUR glory, mind you, but the glory that is the result of Christ in us.

God is not going to glorify us. He is going to glorify Christ – but if Christ is in us, then in the eternal ages, there will come a fullness of release of everything Christ is in us. To put it another way, we will be able to experience ALL OF HIM. We will no longer be hindered by the flesh.

If you read this passage, however, it appears that to the extent that we are abandoning ourselves to Christ now, and are willing to suffer with Him, we will THEN have the capacity to experience Christ. This isn't about God giving different amounts of Christ, or different amounts of inheritance to people. Rather, it is about us having different capacities to experience all of Christ. In other words, God gives all of Jesus TO ALL. But some will be able to experience Him more than others – and the cause is found in how we choose NOW, in accordance with the calling that God has upon us.

The Manifestation of the Sons of God

For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.

In reading this next verse, we must get one thing out of the way: There has been, over the last 50 years, a teaching called, "The Latter Rain." Sometimes it

is called, "The Manifest Sons of God." This teaching essentially claims that at the end of this age, God is going to bring forth a glorious army of His people, who will basically take over the world. At least they will take over the church. All of this is supposed to happen so that these, "manifest sons of God," can simply hand over the kingdom to Jesus when He comes.

If you get what I'm saying, this Latter Rain heresy claims that the manifestation of the sons of God is going to happen on THIS SIDE of the Second Coming. This teaching is error. There is no such thing taught in the Bible. It certainly isn't taught here, in Romans. What the Bible does teach, rather than an end-time revival and glorious church, is apostasy. However, there are movements under way right now, Word of Faith and the new Apostolic Reformation, that are trying to do and be exactly what this error suggests. Christians need to beware of them, for this kind of push is just getting warmed up. Probably all that is missing is a big crisis that will stampede millions to them for supposed safety. My believe is that these supposed, "manifest sons of God," are going to be the embodiment of the spirit of antichrist. But that is another subject.

In context, the manifestation of the sons of God is clearly for the next ages. The whole passage makes that clear – it is our suffering NOW, and our overcoming NOW, that makes all of this possible THEN. Furthermore, even if I made the mistake of thinking that the sons of God are to be made manifest now, I should see the MEANS by which this must happen. It is not by movements, supposed anointing, or big ministry. The sons of God are made manifest because they have suffered WITH HIM – this is why that can have Christ is glorified in them

But once we see that all of creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God in the next age – through the resurrection of the body – it ought to enlarge our thinking. ALL of creation? Can we see a great redemptive plan of God that cannot come to pass until then – until God has sons and daughters? This is what God is doing in this age – adopting sons and daughters in Christ, and preparing them to live with Him forever. Paul says that all of creation is waiting eagerly for this to be brought to pass. What an amazing purpose God must have for us in the eternal ages!

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

This passage makes it certain that the glorious liberty and manifestation of the children of God is not going to happen in this age – for Paul says that we also groan within ourselves waiting for the next age when this will happen. No

wonder God is willing to sacrifice so much in this age for the next. When we get there, as Paul said, the sufferings of this present time won't even be able to be compared to the glory of Christ.

The Spirit Makes Intercession

Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Many charismatics teach that this passage says that believers are to have a, "prayer language." This claim is based on the fact that Paul says that the Spirit makes intercession for us with, "groanings that cannot be uttered." And so the thought is that Spirit must pray THROUGH us in tongues – i.e., we cannot utter these groanings, but the Spirit can utter them through us.

However, if you read this passage, that really doesn't fit. If the Spirit is praying through us in tongues, then those ARE groanings that ARE being uttered – howbeit, by the Spirit through us. But Paul says the Spirit prays with groanings that CANNOT be uttered -- period. Furthermore, he says the Spirit makes intercession FOR the saints – not THROUGH the saints. See what I mean? The real Truth here seems to be that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered in any way – tongues or otherwise. In short, there is prayer going on IN THE SPIRIT – prayer that is something OTHER THAN what we might have considered.

I believe that all of the gifts of the Spirit are possible for today – including the gift of tongues. The doctrine of cessation is not Biblically defensible. This doesn't mean that all the people who claim to speak in tongues are doing so, or that tongues are the evidence of the Holy Spirit. No. All that nonsense has been kicked around for decades to no resolution. The bottom line is WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? The Bible says there is a gift of tongues – even though it does not say everyone has that gift. Neither does the Bible insist that the gift of tongues is to be widespread. All it says is that it is one of the spiritual gifts. Thus, we must hold to the possibility of the gift of tongues in the church today.

My point is this – despite believing that tongues are possible for today, I do not believe you can make this passage teach it. It simply does not say anything about tongues.

But regardless, the promise of Paul is sure. He says that the Holy Spirit Himself makes intercession according to the will of God – because we often do not know how to pray. This is a wonderful comfort to know that the Spirit of God – God the Spirit – is praying for you and I – even if we don't know how to pray. I would submit that when the Holy Spirit prays, God hears and answers – not sometime, but every time.

The Purpose of God

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

This passage must be taken as a whole. And remember – Paul is still talking about the fact that all creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. He is still talking about the fact that the sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to the glory of Christ that is to be revealed in us. In short, Paul is talking about the purpose of God which is ALL OF THAT. But in this passage he gets a little more specific.

Note what he says: He says that all things work together for good. But what is the GOOD towards which all things work together? Well, the purpose of God. And what is that purpose? That we might be conformed to the image of His Son. So Paul is saying that in the life of the born again believer, God will work all things together unto the good – unto the purpose that we might be conformed to Christ.

This is the purpose of God. If it is not my purpose, it will explain much about the difficulty that I might be having in my walk with Christ. We must walk according to the same purpose God is working.

The phrase, "conformed to the image of His Son," is a little misleading in this passage. It makes it sound as if God's purpose is to make us LIKE Jesus, in the sense that we are to be Xerox copies of Jesus. But no. The phrase ought to read, "formed together with Christ." We aren't to be LIKE Jesus. Jesus is actually to live in and through us.

Often, the Christ is said to be the prototype, and we the duplicates. But this completely destroys our ONENESS with Christ. It distorts the fact that all that we are is only because He is IN US. Thus, rather than say we are to be LIKE Jesus, it is more the Truth to say that we are to manifest Christ. Christ is in us, and wants to live through us. He wants more than people who mimic Him.

Of course, Christ doesn't live through us to the disregard of us – He doesn't by pass our wills, or take us over, to live through us. No. In fact, this is why we must submit ourselves to Christ, and lose our lives – then Christ can live through us. Otherwise, He cannot.

Here we see why if Christ wants to live through us that we might become governed by Him, and set free from the government of the flesh. If I am walking after the flesh, Christ cannot live through me. Only if I come to the

Cross and come under His Lordship and walk after the Spirit is Christ living through me. Only then am I being formed together with Him.

We can liken the Holy Spirit in us as an invasion of our former kingdom that is governed by the flesh. A warfare begins. The Holy Spirit will seek to bring all of us under the government of Christ – under the life of Christ. Again, this cannot happen unless we yield, as God gives grace and opportunity. But as we do, Christ can be made manifest through us. We will become a living expression of Jesus as Lord.

The means by which the Christ who is first IN US comes to be seen through us – the means by which we are formed together with Him – is death and resurrection. Our flesh – the SELF – must be crucified out of the way, and then Christ is seen. This is much different than saying that God simply acts upon us to make us like Jesus. No. Christian growth is the result of me decreasing, so that the Christ within might be seen.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. (2 Cor 4:7-10)

To form us TOGETHER with Christ is the purpose of God for His people. It is the GOOD unto which God will work all things. It is the purpose for which He has predestined His church.

Predestination is never unto salvation. It is unto a purpose FOR the saved. And even that isn't irresistible. Paul says much the same thing in Ephesians:

According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Eph 1:4-6)

Why did God choose a people? That we should be holy and without blame before Him. And a whole bunch of other things similar to what it says in Romans 8. But this is different than saying that God has elected some to irresistible salvation, and others to irresistible damnation. No. Predestination has to do with God's purpose for those who come to Christ by faith.

Paul is saying, "God has a wonderful purpose into which He is calling us. He always intended us for this purpose, even before we were born." But there is nothing about this that excludes the possibility that people can refuse the

purpose of God. Sure they can. But the predestined purpose of God will stand for those who embrace Christ.

Calvinists teach unconditional election and irresistible grace. In short, to them if God predestines something for me, it must happen. They cannot accept that God could have a purpose for a person, but that the person could refuse it. To them, this would deny the sovereignty of God. But it does not. God is totally sovereign. But it is precisely because God is sovereign that He is able, not only to put His hand ON people, but also to take His hand OFF, and let them reject Him. Really, only a truly sovereign God would allow people to reject His sovereignty over them – all because He desires free will.

God is not a prisoner of His own sovereignty and foreknowledge. Rather, God is able to be sovereign enough to let people reject Him, and sovereign enough to give us free will. To us, this may be difficult to grasp. But we are not God.

Those who insist that if God purpose is irresistible ought to wake up to reality. How many people do you know have actually been formed together with Christ? How many down through history? Where is this even TAUGHT today? Or ever -- in a widespread manner? The number may be more than we think. But certainly NOT to the masses. The point is, if the purpose of God is irresistible, then God has elected very few to salvation. And He hasn't even seen to it that His own purpose of forming us together with Christ is taught very many places. Furthermore, during this age, God's very own people have done more to hinder His purpose than be part of it. Did God predestine that?

So God has predestined saved people unto a purpose. He wants to form us together with Christ. He will work all things towards that good. But He then allows us to make the choice as to whether to come into His intended desire for us.

Nothing Can Separate

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage is a conclusion of Romans 6 through 8. Paul concludes that since all of his teachings show that God is FOR us, then who can be AGAINST us? He concludes that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Section 4

Truths Related to Romans 6-8

Before proceeding with this commentary on Romans it seems good to stop and bring in some additional Truths. These are not directly mentioned in Romans 6 through 8, but they emerge from the Truth Paul gives in those chapters.

Part 1

The Great Truth of Reconciliation Unto God

Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [you] by us: we pray [you] in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (II Cor. 5:17-21)

The above passage can certainly be considered a summary of the gospel; a summary of the finished work of Jesus Christ – and what that means for humanity. And yet the good news contained in this passage is often either overlooked, or corrupted, by religious flesh. That is why it merits a close examination.

Paul begins by telling us exactly what a Christian person is: A Christian person is one who is IN CHRIST. Or, if you prefer, a Christian person is one in whom Christ dwells. This corresponds to his words to this same Corinthian church in his first letter – it is there that Paul tells us HOW Christ dwells in the believer:

He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (with Him). (I Cor. 6:17)

So we see that the believers in one in spirit with the risen Christ. That is why He is our life; why we are alive with His life: He is THE LIFE, and if we are one with Him in spirit we are alive in Him – in other words, saved.

Paul tells us that this resurrection, spiritual union with Christ constitutes the NEW CREATION in Christ. Note that the believer is not, “acted upon,” and morphed INTO a new creation simply because of faith in Christ. Neither is a person a new creation only in a legal sense. No. The believer BECOMES and IS a new creation solely because of spiritual union WITH Christ – “if anyone is IN CHRIST they ARE a new creation.” This is, of course, equal to the NEW BIRTH.

Now, what follows in Paul’s description of what it means to be IN CHRIST is essential to see. But there is a translation problem here. The KJV and many other versions read, “old things are passed away.” That is not correct. The Greek actually reads, “old things are passed by; old things are passed over.”

What are these, “old things?” Well, if we are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him – if that is what it means to be IN CHRIST – if that spiritual union constitutes the new creation – then the old things that are passed over must be all that is NOT united with Christ; not in Him. And what would those

things be? Not our human spirit – for that IS united with Christ. No. What is not united with Christ is our physical body and our natural, soul man. These are NOT united with Christ in spirit – they could not be, for they are NOT spirit. Rather, they remain outside of our spiritual union with Christ – they are passed over – that is, not incorporated into the new creation in Christ Jesus.

It ought to make sense that Paul would say that our physical body and natural soul man are PASSED OVER as it pertains to the new creation, rather than passed AWAY. Our physical bodies and natural soul man haven't passed away – and don't we know that! We deal with them every day.

So what Paul is describing here is what is often referred to as, "the separation of soul from spirit," in the believer. When the believer puts faith in Christ, it is then that Christ joins us to Himself in spirit – our human spirit united with Him by the means of the Holy Spirit – and we become a new creation IN HIM. That is the new man; the inner man. But our physical body and natural soul man are NOT united with Him in this age. They remain outside of this resurrection union. Thus, we have a separation between that which IS united with Christ – the spirit – and that which is NOT united with Christ – the natural. The Bible often refers to this distinction as, "the flesh vs. the spirit."

Having established that separation – having defined what constitutes the new creation in Christ Jesus – Paul then makes this statement: "All things are become new -- and all things are OUT FROM God." This is the Greek reading.

What is Paul referring to when he says, "All things are become new?" Well, we have already seen that the OLD things that are passed over with regards to the new creation are the physical body and natural soul man – these remain outside of our resurrection union with Christ. Therefore, what Paul means by, "all things are become new," is all that constitutes the new creation in Christ.

The verse division between verses 17 and 18 is unfortunate because it tends to cloud Paul's thought. He is actually saying, "All things that are of the new creation in Christ are OUT FROM GOD – no things that are of the new creation in Christ are out from the natural man, for natural man is passed over as it pertains to the new creation."

This is so essential to grasp. There is absolutely NO contribution to the new creation in Christ Jesus that comes from our old nature; from our natural man. No. That is passed by; passed over -- nothing that is of God in our lives is OUT FROM ourselves. But ALL that is of God in the life of the believer – ALL that is new is OUT FROM God through the Christ with Whom we are joined in spirit. ALL is out from Christ – NOTHING is out from us. That is a complete separation; a complete setting aside of natural man and shows that Jesus Christ is the very life of the believer.

This also shows the danger of incorporating into the spiritual life that which God says is passed over – the natural man. No. There is nothing that can be found in natural man – not even what we might call "good" – that has been

incorporated by God into the new creation. Thus, if WE incorporate any part of natural man into the new creation we are in error. We are bringing in corruption.

The way in which God deals with this issue is by bringing the believer under the work of the Cross so that the natural man might be experientially crucified – in order that Christ, who is our life, might be manifested. All of this is already a done deal. But because humanity has a free will, and because God wants us to grow to KNOW HIM – it all must be worked out and experienced. Paul is simply giving us the Truth.

Reconciliation

This great Truth of the new creation in Christ – and what that really means – is preliminary to the statements that follow in this passage by the apostle Paul. They are statements that are so wonderful, freeing, and eternal, that they have often been buried under the corruption of religious flesh. Let's read them again:

And all things are OUT FROM God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

The first thing we notice in this passage is that God has reconciled US to HIMSELF – by Jesus Christ. There is no suggestion in all of scripture that God ever needed to be reconciled back to humanity. No. The problem between God and humanity has always been humanity. And that problem has never been limited to what we DO. The problem is what we ARE. The Adam race is a dead race; utterly and completely at enmity against God. This is why the redemption of the Adam race was MORE than a matter of forgiveness for sins. Rather, redemption for the Adam race required a full deliverance from what we are through death and resurrection unto a new creation in Christ Jesus.

So often we define salvation as a matter of God forgiving us for our sins – so that we can be sure we are, “going to heaven.” But this is an extremely limited definition that is actually blinds people to the magnitude of the real Truth of what Christ has done. If all that Jesus Christ made possible was for God to forgive our sins then what did that do to address SIN ITSELF – what does forgiveness FOR sin do to set me free FROM sin? We might say we are forgiven for sins, but that does nothing to deliver humanity FROM the condition of sin; from death.

The reason so many people accept this limited version of the redemption is that we have accepted the error that the problem between God and man IS GOD. We believe that God is mad; God must punish for sin. In other words, contrary to the words of Paul, we do think that Jesus Christ reconciled GOD back to MAN. We have bought into the false notion that because humanity sins that

God is angry – and because God is holy He MUST punish humanity with death. But wait. Jesus was sent to appease God in His anger – give Him the death He needed to justify His forgiveness for sin. Thus, God is appeased, and forgives humanity. To many, THAT is salvation. It is how Jesus reconciled GOD back to MAN.

But if you examine this notion, it does nothing at all to actually address the sin IN HUMANITY. It simply forgives the sin – it simply lifts the death penalty from the sinner while leaving the sinner IN SIN. It does absolutely NOTHING to deliver us from the Adam race or birth us in Christ as a new creation.

Paul is telling us directly that, “God was IN CHRIST reconciling US back to GOD.” That one statement alone ought to completely adjust and redefine our false assumptions about the redemption. It agrees completely with the rest of scripture, including the most well known passage from John 3:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

Note the motives of God in giving His Son: “For God so loved the world.” Does it say, “For God was so angry with the world that He gave...” No. Indeed, John states that God gave His Son so that no one needs to perish, but so that whoever would believe could be saved. If the false notion of the redemption were true then this could not be true – for John would have to write that God gave His Son to appease His own anger. The false notion makes the penalty for sin God’s anger – rather than the penalty for sin to be what it really is: The death of the sinner. Sin kills. Not God. The fact that God must judge the sinner worthy of death if the sinner will not turn does not change that fact.

Paul states that God was, in Christ reconciling humanity back to Himself – by giving His Son so that none need to perish. God initiated the redemption of humanity because, “God so loved the world.” God did all that is necessary for the redemption of every single human being who will ever live – in His Son.

But now we can see that this great redemption was not merely some legal forgiveness. It was not merely a forgiveness FOR sin – in the sense of removing the death penalty – only to leave the sinner in sin as a member of the Adam race. Rather, the redemption was a deliverance from the Adam race through death and resurrection in Christ into a NEW race – the new creation in Christ.

Redemption is not a, “fixing up,” of the Adam race. It is not the removal of God’s death penalty from the Adam race. Rather, on the Cross the death penalty was completely FILLED and satisfied. Jesus Christ not only died for our sins – but He died AS US. On the Cross, Jesus bore the entirety of the Adam race in His own person – and consequently He bore all of the sins of the Adam race – and He died. Thus, the Adam race was planted into the death of Jesus

Christ. The Adam race -- as the race in which God was working ENDED at the Cross.

This is why Jesus is called, "The Last Adam." Having brought the Adam race fully into God's glory by His sinless life as a human being, He offered Himself as the One who would bear all of the rest of the Adam race down into death. He was the Last Adam in the sense that He was the fullness of what God wanted in Adam – the consummate Adam, if you will – but He was the Last Adam because in Him the Adam race ended at the Cross. What was risen three days later was not a, "fixed up," Adam race. No. Jesus Christ was the author of a NEW race – a new creature born of resurrection life.

This is what Paul is getting at in our passage. "If anyone is IN CHRIST they are a NEW CREATION. Old things are passed over. All things that are of that spiritual union with Christ are NEW – and all of that NEW is OUT FROM GOD through Christ." This is a full deliverance – through death and resurrection in Christ – from out of the old creation in Adam into the new creation in Christ Jesus. It is utter and complete deliverance from, and separation from the old – and an utter and complete reconciliation of humanity back to God through His Son.

All Are Reconciled Back to God

What Paul states next in this passage is not commonly understood or preached. Religious tradition and self-righteousness has blinded most of us to the enormity of the Truth that Paul states. He says:

God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Note two phrases in this passage: First, "God HAS (past tense) reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." Second, "God was in Christ (past tense) reconciling the world unto Himself – NOT IMPUTING their trespasses unto them." You have TWO groups being spoken of – "US," meaning believers, and, "the world," meaning unbelievers. Yet Paul states that God has already reconciled both US and THE WORLD to Himself through Jesus Christ. Indeed, he even states that because God has reconciled the world to Himself, He is NOT IMPUTING their sins unto them. That is astounding. But what does that really mean?

It means that full reconciliation is a completed work for every human being that has ever lived or will live. It means the unbelievers are just as much reconciled to God as are believers. Read it. That is what it says. And just so we would not misunderstand, Paul says that God is, "not imputing," the sins of unbelievers unto them – precisely because of the reconciliation that Christ has finished for them.

Yet how many of us actually believe that? Most of us do not believe it. What we believe is that believers are reconciled to God because we believe – and that unbelievers are not reconciled to God because they don't believe. Yet Paul is clearly stating that ALL are reconciled to God whether they believe or not – God is not imputing sin even to unbelievers.

Is this universal salvation? Is Paul saying that people are saved whether they believe or not? NO. We need to be clear about that. Paul is NOT saying all are saved whether they believe or not – He is not saying that all are in Christ as new creations whether they believe or not. He is simply saying that all are reconciled back to God whether they believe it or know it. Being reconciled to God is not equal to salvation. Being reconciled to God simply means that Jesus Christ has removed all obstacles between God and humanity – by taking away the sin of humanity – by no longer imputing sin to humanity. This does not mean that everyone will actually believe or embrace that great Truth.

And therein is the entire issue. Solely by the grace and initiative of God – because God so loves the world – Jesus Christ has – in Himself -- reconciled the entire human race back to God. He has taken away all sin – taken away every sin that could separate humanity from God. We need only believe and embrace Him – knowing this is finished. We need only take our place -- through repentance -- in His death – the death that made this possible. And if we do, and ONLY if we do, will we be raised in Him as new creatures unto newness of life. But if we will not believe, then we remain reconciled to God – but it will do us no good. Indeed, we will be guilty of refusing the grace of God.

To put it simply, the way into the holy of holies is clear for all humanity – the veil is forever rent. There is no sin that you and I could commit that can sew that veil back up and keep us out – there is no sin that can undo what Jesus has done. Therefore, THE SIN is the refusal to enter in; THE SIN is unbelief. The only sin that can keep you and I from Jesus Christ is THE SIN of refusing Jesus Christ. THE SIN of refusing Jesus Christ is THE SIN of refusing reconciliation back to God.

To follow up on the example of the holy of holies – no sin can close the door that Jesus has opened; no sin can sew that veil back up. But THE SIN is our refusal to walk through that eternally opened door.

Herein we see the ONE sin that has no forgiveness. Jesus Christ died for every sin ever committed by every human being. But He could not die for THE SIN of refusing His death. How could He? That would be a contradiction. Jesus did not die for the sin of refusing His death. God cannot forgive the refusal of His forgiveness. That is why it is the sin that has no forgiveness.

This sin that has no forgiveness is the sin of unbelief – not a temporary lapse of faith – but the sin of finally neglecting or refusing God's only way through Jesus Christ. You will remember that the first words of the gospel are, "Repent and believe." Well, what do we repent of? Sins? Ok. But ultimately we are to

repent of UNBELIEF – and if we do, then we will do what? – we will BELIEVE. And if we do believe then it is only because we have repented of unbelief. Thus, the real issue between God and humanity is no longer acts of sin. The real issue is faith verses unbelief. If I believe and embrace Christ the sin issue is addressed. If I refuse to believe and embrace Christ, then I am refusing to believe that the sin issue is addressed – and am guilty of the ultimate sin of refusing God’s deliverance from sin through His Son.

Jesus Christ has reconciled all of humanity back to God. The choice of humanity is whether we will enter BY FAITH into all that His reconciliation has made possible – the choice is faith or unbelief. In short, Jesus died for the entire Adam race. But only those who believe will be united with Christ in resurrection union, and thus saved.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [you] by us: we pray [you] in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

What is the, “ministry of reconciliation?” Well, a deeper meaning is found in this passage if we once again examine the original Greek. The words, “has given us the ministry of reconciliation,” actually read, “has LODGED in us the ministry of reconciliation.” In other words, this ministry of reconciliation is more than just a message that we repeat. It is Christ in us – it is part of those NEW things that are all OUT FROM GOD. In short, if we are in Christ, then His very presence in us is not only the means of our reconciliation back to God – but this very same Christ is the means of reconciliation for ALL. The ministry that ought to emerge is that of the Truth of God in Jesus Christ – the Truth of grace. God has, in Christ, reconciled all back to Himself. It is an ongoing, abiding, Truth. It is a continual plea and exhortation to all: Be you reconciled to God, that is, walk through the open way back to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, how his applies to unbelievers ought to be apparent. But Paul says to believers, “Be you reconciled to God.” And isn’t it a fact that so often when we sin or fail – isn’t it a fact that we don’t feel as if we are reconciled to God? We feel cut off from Him. But while conviction and confession are right – we need to state the Truth if we have sinned – we also need to state the Truth that we are already forever reconciled to God. For if God is not imputing the trespasses of unbelievers unto them, then He certainly is not imputing trespasses to those in Christ.

Do we imagine that if we accept this great Truth that we will begin to sin because grace abounds? Well, we need not worry that we will begin to sin -- simply because we never stopped. The real Truth is, if we believe and accept the grace of God through Christ -- this is the only path to freedom FROM sin. We must first believe and enter in.

Is this not grace? What do you and I think we are going to do about our sin otherwise? No. God has, in Christ, done everything there is to do about sin. He has not only forgiven all sin forever, and reconciled the human race back to Himself, but He has delivered those who believe from out of the Adam race into resurrection union with Jesus Christ.

Part 2

The Forgiveness of Sins

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:12-14)

In Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, there is forgiveness for ALL sin. This is, of course, the foundational Truth of Christianity. But in order to more fully grasp it, we must set in order a number of related Truths, and get to the root of what forgiveness of sin really is.

The Truth of the Redemption, indeed, of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, is predicated on another Truth: That we need it. If I do not believe that I am a dead sinner, who is lost and deceived without God, I am not going to think I need redemption. If I do not believe that I need forgiveness from God and deliverance from sin, then I am not going to take seriously the finished work of Jesus Christ.

When I say, "believe it" I mean more than simply "agree to." Any of us can give assent to the Biblical doctrine of repentance from sin, and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. But the question is, "Do I realize that I must repent? Do I realize that I must receive forgiveness?" And more importantly, "Have I done so?" Have I actually BELIEVED – that is – placed my whole self into the hands of God through Jesus Christ? – in an unconditional moral surrender?

There is no salvation for me unless I have done so. Salvation is the result of seeing my helplessness as a sinner who has lived independent of God. But that is not all. Likewise, I must see the One who is the solution. I have to place my faith in Jesus Christ. IN HIM is forgiveness of sin.

The Sin

The fundamental problem with human beings – in the eyes of God – is not found in the bad things we DO. Certainly we have all done many bad, sinful things. But there is a root cause for all of our "acts of sin." The fundamental problem is that we have all been living independent of God. That is THE SIN.

God made man a dependent creature. Note that: A DEPENDENT creature is the KIND of creature we are. Nothing will ever change that. So right now, like it or not, you have your faith and dependency in something. If it is not in God, it is in yourself – or in some projection of yourself. As a dependent creature, you don't have the choice as to whether to have faith. You only decide what to put your faith IN: God or yourself.

This principle was there right from the creation of Adam. When God created Adam, He planted two trees. The tree of life represented faith and dependence upon God. The forbidden tree represented faith in oneself – independence from God. That is why it was said that if you ate of the forbidden tree that you would "be as God," deciding good and evil. Eating of that tree was a declaration of independence from God – in favor of self-rule.

So here we see that the original sin of Adam was that he declared his independence from God. He chose self-rule and self-ownership – over and against belonging to God. This sin had catastrophic consequences. Why? Well, independence from God is willful separation from God. And we all know what "separation from God" is, don't we? It is death. When Adam walked away from God, he died. He walked away from the Source of all life.

When Adam severed his relationship with God, he died spiritually, and corrupted what a human being IS -- as a creature. But he also severed the entire human race from God. Thus, each of us are born into this world separated from God.

None of us since Adam ever sat down and chose to be born separated from God. We were born into it. But we affirm Adam's choice every second that we continue to live independent of God. And if God brings the Light and Truth of Jesus Christ into our world, then we affirm Adam's sin by neglecting or refusing to come back to God through Jesus Christ.

So now we clearly see THE SIN – THE SIN of the human race. It is independence from God; self-rule; belonging to myself. We are not only born that way, but we continue to AFFIRM this rebellion and independence throughout our lives.

As mentioned, the problem with each of us is not fundamentally in what we DO. The problem is what we ARE. We are a fallen race – a dead race. We are creatures who are MADE FOR GOD, but who are separated from God. The sinful things we DO are nothing more than the outcome of our faith being in ourselves, and of us living for ourselves. All of the "acts of sin" that we DO are the result of independence from God.

Jesus Christ came to redeem us from this condition, and to restore us back to God. It is by taking our faith off of ourselves, and putting it in Him, that we are saved. In short, rather than live in the unbelief of self-rule, we must repent and "come to Jesus" by faith. We have to get back to the purpose for which God originally created man: Eternal fellowship with Him.

Unbelief

The sin of independence from God has a name – one which is used quite often in the Bible. That sin is called UNBELIEF. This only makes sense once you

realize that FAITH is trust, dependence, and reliance, upon God. Unbelief, which is the opposite, is therefore independence and self-reliance.

I am living in unbelief if I am living independent of God. Most of us, of course, do this without any knowledge of what we are doing. Living in unbelief comes natural – we are born "in Adam" to do that. Tell someone in this condition that they are ABNORMAL, and need deliverance, and they will think that you are foolish.

Today – even in some churches – if you suggest that people who are "in Adam" are ABNORMAL, and need the Cross of Jesus Christ to deliver them, you will be branded as mean-spirited. People like the gospel of self-esteem. They don't want to talk about themselves as sinners.

Paul addressed this possibility in his epistle to the Corinthians. He said:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (I Cor. 1:18)

According to the apostle Paul, if I think that the Cross of Jesus Christ – the means of God's forgiveness – is foolish or unnecessary, it is evidence that I am ALREADY in the process of perishing. Of course. I don't see any need for Jesus Christ, or His Cross. I see no need for forgiveness. Therefore, I am still living in my sin – the sin of independence from God.

There can be only one solution to independence from God: Dependence upon Him. Faith. Back to the original relationship God intended. Back to being NORMAL. This spells LIFE. It is the relationship Jesus came to restore.

Unbelief is the affirmation of Adam's sin: To live independent from God. Again, we are born into this condition -- through the nature we inherit from Adam. But once Light comes into our world, and we see that we need to be delivered, we are no longer blind. At that point we must choose. Ultimately, willful unbelief is the refusal or neglect to surrender to Jesus Christ.

We are now beginning to see why FAITH in Christ is necessary. FAITH in Christ is a renouncing of our independence, through repentance, and is a moral choice to fully dependent on God. We are saved "by grace through faith." We fully depend and rely upon what Jesus Christ has done. And our faith in Him stays in Him – forever.

God's Light

God must show us we are ABNORMAL. The only way to do this is to introduce the NORMAL. If I had an inaccurate yard stick, but no other, I would just go on, not aware that everything I was measuring was inaccurate. But if someone provides an accurate yard stick, which I can put alongside of the bad one, then

I will be able to see the Truth. I will see the wrong, because now I have the right. I will see what is ABNORMAL, because there is now a NORMAL in front of me – a correct standard.

God has to show us that we are unrighteous and abnormal. We cannot see this ourselves, because all we have to work with is an abnormal "yardstick." We cannot measure ourselves by ourselves and expect to arrive at the Truth. So what God does is introduce His righteousness – which is the accurate "yardstick." And actually, God has been doing this right from the point when Adam sinned.

A big step in God's plan of redemption occurred when God gave Israel His law. That was quite a yardstick for righteousness. Paul tells us the purpose for which God gave His law:

Now we know that whatever things the law says, it says them to those who are under the law -- that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

God certainly gave His law to reveal to us His righteousness. He was saying to us, "If you want to know how to live perfectly in My sight, here is how." But did God actually think we could? No. The fundamental purpose of God's law was to expose us as sinners. As Romans says, when the law speaks, every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is shown to be guilty before God. Everyone of us is shown to be ABNORMAL.

In effect, the law of God was His "accurate yard stick." Once we see His law, we see how crooked and ABNORMAL we are. It leads us to realize that we have been living independent of God.

Conscience

The law of God is holy, just, and good. (Rom. 7:14) There is nothing wrong with God's law. But when we look into the law of God, we see that we are NOT holy, just, and good. Indeed, we see that we are unholy, unjust, and bad. God's law was therefore His instrument for bringing Light in our world, that we might see just how far short we are from His glory.

Again – the law of God represents God's NORMAL. Once it is put along side of us, we see that we are ABNORMAL – and in need of something far beyond ourselves.

The law was a witness to man of his corrupt condition. But even those who were not given the law have such a witness. The Gentiles were never given the

law of God. Yet Paul tells us that they – as well as Israel – have the witness of right and wrong within them of CONSCIENCE.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (Romans 2:14-16)

Paul is telling us that there is a "moral monitor" in each of us which bears witness to right and wrong. In fallen man it is an imperfect witness, for it does not always perfectly define what is right and wrong. But it is there, telling us we OUGHT to do right. We all have a conscience. We all know SOME right and wrong.

Do you doubt that everyone knows right and wrong? Well, the next time someone does wrong to YOU – it will prove my point. You will protest because you believe you have been wronged! From where did you get that knowledge? You KNOW right from wrong.

Our conscience is a residual of what God originally created in man. And while it cannot, in and of itself, reveal to us Jesus Christ, and cannot, in and of itself, save us even if we obey it, it CAN and DOES tell us what failures we are. We cannot even live up to the standard of our own conscience!

God's law, and even our conscience, tells us one thing if it tells us nothing else: We fall short. It tells us that there is a standard which is outside of ourselves, and which is higher than ourselves – which shows us to be ABNORMAL. Thus, it points us to GOD. Add to the law and our conscience the fact that God will orchestrate various situations in life to show us our need. God is at work to point us to Christ.

Part 3

Repentance

In all of this, we begin see how a bad person – one born in Adam -- can make a right choice. It is true that a bad person cannot make himself good. But a bad person can be shown how bad he is – and how good Jesus is. He can then make the choice to put his faith in Christ. Again – we must put our faith in something or someone. We have never lost this capacity. It is fundamental to what we are.

What we are describing here is really the outcome of repentance. Once we see what THE SIN is – that we have been living for ourselves independent of God – we then know what we need to repent of. We need to repent of self-rule – of self-dependence. We do this by surrendering to God and by putting our faith in Jesus Christ.

There is simply no escaping it: Man is accountable to God. We can deny it, avoid it, and even protest it. But in the final analysis, we will answer to Him. We have been living independent of God, and if we have heard the gospel, we have refused or neglected to come to Jesus. THAT IS SIN – great sin. It is sin against God Himself. We must repent of it.

God doesn't make it complicated. If our root sin is that we have affirmed the sin of Adam by living independent of God, then the solution is that we need to come back to God. I have to stop putting my faith in myself – stop living for myself – and I have to START putting my faith in Jesus Christ. I have to return to totally dependence and surrender to God.

What we see here is CHANGE. It is a change of direction and a change of mind. That is what the terms "conversion" and "repentance" mean. I have to stop walking away from Jesus, and turn around, and "come to Jesus."

Thus, to "come to Jesus," I must repent. But of what? Of NOT "coming to Jesus!" Of unbelief. And if I do repent of unbelief, I will do what? Well, I will come to Jesus! I will BELIEVE. That is what at the forefront of the gospel message is always the command, "Repent and believe!"

Some folks imagine that they must take inventory and confess and repent of every sin they have ever committed before they can come to Jesus. But this is not Biblical. The Bible tells us to confess our sins. Repent of our sins. But always, the confession and repentance of my many sins is the RESULT of coming to Jesus – and never the requirement BEFORE I can come.

We see this in the first epistle of John. John says:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that

we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no 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 to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5-9)

Here we see that if we come to the Light, we have fellowship. If we come into the Light, we will see our sins and confess them. None of this is required – or possible – before we come to the Light. All of these things are the result of coming into the Light and Truth of Jesus Christ.

Thus, we see this wonderful Truth: The sin of the human race is that we have lived independent of God. It is THE SIN. Our affirmation of this sin is unbelief. We must therefore repent of unbelief – and in doing so, BELIEVE, i.e., come to Jesus. Once we do, salvation is ours. And in Christ we will find forgiveness for all of our sins.

The Finality of Forgiveness

When we turn to Christ by faith, we receive forgiveness in Him. It is forgiveness for unbelief – for our refusal or neglect to turn to Him. But once we do turn to Christ, we also find forgiveness, indeed, deliverance, from all the "acts of sin" which we committed as the result of living independent of God.

God's forgiveness through Christ is a done deal. It cannot not be undone, or added to. Forgiveness is finished. It would be finished and complete if not one person ever believed or benefited from it. God's forgiveness is as finished and as final as is the death of His Son which paid for it.

We need to understand what this means. It means that God has done all the forgiving He is going to do. It means that if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you are as forgiven, right now, as you are ever going to be. You are not getting forgiven, but you are a forgiven person.

If there is one Truth of Christianity which has been misrepresented and misunderstood, it is this one: The finality of God's forgiveness. Understanding it sets so much in place. Misunderstanding it throws everything else out of whack.

For instance, in Romans 8:1, Paul tells us that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Why is he able to make such a statement? Because forgiveness is finished. There is nothing you can do to UNFINISH it. There is therefore no possibility of condemnation when forgiveness is finished and unalterable.

All through the New Testament, the forgiveness of God is a FINISHED act:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake HAS forgiven you. (Eph. 4:32)

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, HAS he quickened together with Him, HAVING forgiven ALL your trespasses. (Col. 2:13)

I write unto you, little children, because your sins ARE forgiven you for His name's sake. (I John 2:12)

To wit, that God was, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. (II Cor. 5:19)

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7)

Have we realized that right now -- if we are in Christ -- that we are eternally and unalterably forgiven? And that there is nothing which stands between us and God? This is a Truth, which if realized, would change our lives.

Part 4

Deliverance

Forgiveness is often spoken of as merely a "legal classification." Certainly, Paul uses the legal position as a means of illustrating the forgiveness of God. But God did more for us than to simply legally "reclassify" us from unsaved to saved, or from condemned to forgiven. God not only forgave our sins in Christ – through Christ God has DELIVERED us from sin itself.

The Truth is, if all God did was forgive us, in the sense of reclassification, but did nothing to deliver us from sin itself, then what He has done is not a moral thing. This would mean that God "forgives" us FOR sin, but leaves us IN sin. You can see the problem. God had to do more than change our legal position. He had to change US.

Herein we see why salvation is called a new birth – why we are called new creations in Christ Jesus. In Christ we have, not only forgiveness, but DELIVERANCE from the old creation, and a new birth into the new.

The Greek word for forgiveness in the New Testament bears this out. It means, "to release; to send away." So ask: When God forgives us, what is released or sent away? Merely our guilt? Only some punishment for sin? No. WE are released. We are set free from sin.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He did not merely bear the penalty FOR sin. He bore sin itself. THAT is why we are not only forgiven for sin, it is why we are delivered from sin itself through the Cross, and then the resurrection.

Grace Abounds

The finished forgiveness of God, and the deliverance which we experience through the Cross, is pictured in a rhetorical question Paul asked of the Romans. In Romans 6:1, he asks, "Shall we continue in sin because grace abounds?" His question is just as important as is his answer. Why? Because it tells us that grace DOES abound even when we sin! That means that forgiveness is finished. Even if we sin it is finished!

Many Christians cannot conceive of a finished forgiveness. To them, that would lead to license, which IS "sinning because grace abounds." Yet notice: Paul is SAYING that grace abounds even though we sin. He is SAYING that. That is why he is asking the rhetorical question, "Shall we continue in sin BECAUSE grace abounds."

Paul operates from the premise that the forgiveness of God is finished. If we sin it does not change the fact. Why? Because it never depended on whether

we sinned to begin with. The forgiveness of God depends only upon Jesus Christ.

The reality is, if I am sinning BECAUSE grace abounds – that is – using the grace of God as a license to sin, I am not converted. I can't be. Why? Because if I am converted I got that way by repenting of sin – by coming to Jesus! By wanting to forsake sin! Or, to use Paul's answer to his own question, "How can anyone who is dead to sin live any longer IN sin?"

Why don't we continue in sin, seeing as how grace abounds? Because we are DEAD to sin. Here we see DELIVERANCE through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Before conversion, we were alive to sin, and dead to God. After conversion, we are alive to God, and dead to sin. Here we see a change – not merely legal – but in US. We are delivered from the power of sin through the Blood of the Cross.

The Righteousness of God

God gave his law for the purpose of cornering us into the conclusion that we are ABNORMAL, wrong, and in need of forgiveness and salvation. He gave us a good law to show us how bad we are. Then, He tells us to put our faith in Jesus – by repenting of the sin of not putting our faith in Christ.

Through faith, God offers us forgiveness. But more. He offers us a righteousness. It is a righteousness which has nothing to do with us – a righteousness which is in Jesus Christ.

This is, in fact, Paul's conclusion in Romans:

But now the righteousness of God which is independent from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:19-24)

God is saying, "I have shown you that you are not righteous. I have shown you that you need forgiveness. But I have also shown you that there is nothing in you by which this can be accomplished. Not by your works and not by your self-effort." And then He says, "There is a righteousness which I have for you that is totally independent of anything about yourself. It is the righteousness of My Son. It can become yours only by faith."

Do we really understand what "the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ" is? Some misunderstand this, and think that our faith IN Christ is what makes us righteous. We think that, sure, we cannot make ourselves

righteous by works, but we CAN make ourselves righteous by faith. We may not say it quite that way, but it is what we assume.

This misunderstanding leads to all kinds of nonsense. For instance, there are those who object to the suggestion that we can even have faith to begin with – on the grounds that it would be merit, or "a contribution to our own salvation." That, they say, would abort grace. But this is a "straw man argument," for it is an argument against what faith is NOT, rather than what faith IS.

And then, of course, there are those of us who DO think our faith is to our credit. We think that it is because we had faith in Christ that God saved us. Without realizing it, we have unwittingly put our faith IN our faith!

True Biblical faith – the faith which God says results in salvation – never carries MERIT. It is never said to be "our contribution to our salvation." Indeed, true faith emerges from the conviction that I have NO MERIT. True faith emerges from the conviction that I can make NO contribution to my salvation. Faith is never in my faith. Faith is in Jesus Christ.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God does to us what He did to Abraham. God "reckons it to us as righteousness." But notice what this does NOT mean. It does NOT mean that our faith makes us righteous. No. Faith, in and of itself, is NEVER said to make us righteous. Rather, Jesus makes me righteous – because my faith is in HIM. But that is not all. By faith His righteousness is in me.

Get this. Our faith is in the Righteous One. HE makes us righteous. But not as a thing unto ourselves. Our faith in Him results in His righteousness in us. The righteousness is Jesus in us.

When we see that faith is total reliance and dependence this becomes clear. God says that if we will, from a conviction that we are unrighteous, put our faith in the Righteous One, then His righteousness becomes ours.

What is happening here is no more complicated than a bankrupt person relying on someone else for their need. There is no merit involved. There is no contribution possible. It is simple – and desperate – trust and reliance.

Forgiveness

God's forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ is at once the most simple, yet profound Truth. And the means by which we obtain this forgiveness is simple faith. I repent of living for myself by turning around and "coming to Jesus." I place my faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel of grace. And happily, God is at work calling and drawing each of us to see and experience this Truth.

Section 5

Commentary on Romans 9-16

Romans

Chapter 9

The Election and Call of God

In chapters 2 through 8, Paul has explained our freedom from the law through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has taken that explanation all the way through to our destiny as sons of God in the eternal ages. Now, he leaves off that theme and addresses Israel. He must. Israel was the people God had chosen to be used to be a light to the nations. They were to be used of God in a mighty way. But they failed to allow God to have His way with them. Now that the gospel is being proclaimed to ALL nations, Paul being the apostle to the Gentiles, it is necessary for him to tell his readers what is to become of God's chosen people. Have they lost out forever? Or will God yet have His way with Israel? Chapter 9 addresses that, as well as the difficult topic of "predestination."

In our day, we may not be able to grasp the importance of Paul's digression. But Paul is going to show his readers the Truth of GRACE -- grace that is freely given to ALL men, both Jews and Gentiles -- then he must address the position of God's chosen people in his teaching. He must explain how Israel can remain the chosen people even though all men are included in God's salvation.

9: 1 I say the Truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

A verse like 9:1, which is not intended to be a direct teaching about the place of the human conscience in the believer's walk, nevertheless give us valuable insight. A person's conscience is the faculty which tells him that he ought to do right. Notice that the conscience is not able to tell him what IS right. No. That is why what bothers one person's conscience does not bother another's. They have learned different value systems. The conscience of each, however, will prod them to obey their system. It is only when the Truth sets us free from our human value systems and habits of conscience that we are able to respond in our conscience according to what is right in the eyes of God.

When my "conscience bears me witness in the Holy Ghost" I have reached the point where the conscience of the Holy Ghost and my conscience are in agreement. This is true freedom, and is only possible if I am willing to allow

God to set me free from my ways of thinking and viewing things.

- 9: 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.**
- 9: 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.**
- 9: 4 Who are Israelites, to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.**
- 9: 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.**

Paul was a Jew. He had excelled above his peers in the religious traditions which had been passed down through the centuries. Now, however, he saw the folly of much of it. He wished that all of his brethren could see the Truth as he saw it. He knew the freedom they did not yet possess.

Paul's grief is especially heavy because of all of the things God had given to Israel. Despite the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service, Israel had rejected the Christ God had sent. The chosen people of God had now been left behind -- temporarily -- and Paul was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

- 9: 6 Not as though the word of God has taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel.**
- 9: 7 Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but, "In Isaac shall they seed be called."**
- 9: 8 That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of promise are counted for the seed.**
- 9: 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son."**

Here we see one of the great "types" of the Bible, and a theme we need to understand if we are to grasp God's purposes. Israel was a natural people

made up of the natural offspring of Abraham. God intended to use them for a particular purpose. But the natural offspring of Abraham, according to God, aren't the "real" Israel. The REAL Israel is spiritual. They are all whom are born again through Jesus Christ.

We saw this clearly stated in chapter 2:27-29. Just as the natural seed of natural Israel was born through Isaac, so the spiritual seed is born through Jesus Christ.

This teaching got Paul into much trouble with those who tried to keep Christianity within a Jewish framework. The Bible reveals that even Peter, James, and many of those at the Jerusalem church, were insistent that Gentiles, at best, were "second class citizens" of the kingdom of God. The idea that their natural heritage as a Jew had no relationship to their spiritual relationship to God was almost unthinkable to the religious Jew of the time.

God wanted to do a wonderful thing with the nation of Israel. But even if it had all come to pass as God intended, it was not going to be an end unto itself. Had Israel become all God wanted, it would have only been to the same end Paul is describing: Spiritual Israel, with ALL people classified as spiritual Jews. God is going to have His purpose. He is going to have His people. Man's failure won't stop that ultimate purpose.

9:10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac,

9:11 For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,

9:12 It was said unto her, "The elder shall serve the younger."

9:13 As it is written: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Verse 11-13 show so clearly how we have absolutely nothing to do with God's purpose and calling. It is ALL of His grace; his election. Paul shows this by reminding us that God chose Jacob over Esau even before they were born -- thus precluding the possibility that His election could have anything to do with their works. God chose Jacob because He wanted to. His reasons are not given to us. That is good enough.

Can we possibly grasp the totality of God's grace as illustrated by this teaching? God's grace has NOTHING to do with us. He doesn't give it to us

because of anything we do, because we believe, or even because we ask Him. Our asking is actually evidence that His grace is already at work in us. God has saved us because He wanted to -- He loves us. That's it.

We must not misunderstand the amazing statement, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It is only a contrast. God did not actually HATE Esau. He simply didn't choose him for the purpose He chose Jacob. His election of Jacob over Esau is Hebraically illustrated with the word "hate."

God is NOT a respecter of persons. It is therefore impossible that God showed any kind of favoritism toward Jacob. Indeed, God also had a wonderful purpose for Esau. It's just that it wasn't the purpose He had for Jacob -- to be an ancestor of a great people, and eventually, the Savior.

This is a lesson for us. Not all are called to the same function in the Body of Christ. But this means nothing with regards to our eternal function in God. God is no respecter of persons. He simply elects different ones for different purposes -- and much of the time we cannot know why.

9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

9:15 For He says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

9:16 So then it is not of him that wills, not of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

From the human standpoint, when God chooses one person for a blessing, rather than the next, it is unfair. But from God's standpoint it is not unfair at all. Why? Because there is more to what God is doing than we can grasp in the here and now. We have to rid ourselves of our temporal perspective. Very little that God does in this age is ever going to find it's real fruition or satisfaction in this age. It is all for the next age. Our failure to rest by faith in that Truth always results in confusion because we are trying to see an entire picture when we have only a few of the pieces at our disposal.

Verse 16 repeats the Truth of 11-13. Nothing God does is "of" OUR will, or "of" OUR running, but simply of HIM. But some have misunderstood this Truth. Does it mean that it doesn't matter what we do? Are we merely pieces on a chess board that God manipulates? Is everything already decided in the mind of God -- to the point where I might as well just sit back and let Him work it out?

At this point in the chapter, Paul begins to touch on what has been termed the "doctrine of predestination." This doctrine, in its purest form, suggests that God determines who is saved and who is condemned. It claims that even the choices made by man regarding these two possible fates are predetermined by God. This section of chapter nine is most often used to support this doctrine.

9:17 For the scripture says unto Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth."

9:18 Therefore has He mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens.

9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, "Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

9:20 Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, "Why have you made me thus?"

9:21 Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

9:22 What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?

9:23 And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.

The question here boils down to whether God caused Pharaoh to resist His will, or whether Pharaoh chose to resist by his own will. Those who believe in "predestination" would say that God ordained Pharaoh unto destruction, and as verse 9:17 seems to indicate, raised him up for the very purpose of resisting God so that God could make an example of him. But does this claim jive with the rest of scripture?

It is, of course, impossible to address such a complex subject at length here. But we can touch upon some of the more important scriptures on the matter. Two which come to mind are John 6:44 and I Timothy 2:4. In John,

Jesus says, "No man can come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw him." And Paul writes, "...God, our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the Truth." The words of Jesus seem to confirm predestination -- if taken alone. If no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him, then obviously, it is God who pre-ordains salvation. But wait. Look at the scripture from Timothy. There it plainly says that God desires ALL men to be saved. Put the two together and you have an astounding Truth: A man can only be saved if God initiates his salvation. But since God wills that ALL be saved, then God must initiate the salvation of ALL men -- for God always carries out His will. The trouble is, not all are saved, are they? Nope. That leaves us with the simple conclusion that God wants all to be saved, promises to initiate the salvation of all, but leaves the choice as to whether to receive salvation in the hands of each person. This is, in fact, the Biblical Truth on the matter.

Those who believe in strict predestination protest that if any one is able to refuse the salvation of God, then that person is more powerful than God. They claim that if God is truly sovereign, then no one will be able to refuse salvation -- the call of God will carry a grace that make refusing something they would never want to do. They point to these verses in Romans to prove the point. They say, "Romans says that God determines who is saved and who is condemned. Regarding Pharoah, Paul even asks the rhetorical question, 'Why does He yet find fault?' -- a question which would only be asked of a God who was responsible for a person refusing salvation. We would ask, "Lord, YOU have ordained Pharoah's resistance to You. How can You then find fault with him, or with any others who resist You by Your own will -- seeing it is YOU who have ordained what they are doing?"

These are good questions. But if we go back to the story of Pharaoh, we find some answers. A look into the original Hebrew helps. Look up every verse where the Bible says that Pharaoh "hardened his heart," or that "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." If you check, you will find that originally, the Bible says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It is only later that we find a consistent "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." In this we find the real Truth: A man initially chooses to open himself to God, or harden his heart. It is only later that it can be said that God hardens anyone's heart.

We see this in the book of Hebrews. There it says, "Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your heart." (Heb. 3:7-8,15,4:7) If God was solely responsible for hardening anyone's heart, there could not even so much as be the command, "Do not harden your heart." We wouldn't have the option.

Yet the question remains as to why God would ever harden a person's heart? The answer, rather than show God as One who ordains people unto death, shows Him as the persistent Redeemer. When the Bible says that God hardens the heart of anyone, it is speaking figuratively. This was a common idiom, or way of expression, in that culture. If God ALLOWED anything, it was not uncommon to say that God actually did it. The person of that time would know what you meant. Carry that fact into some of these verses. It means that no, God does not harden the heart of anyone. He wants, in fact, to soften our hearts. Indeed, if I choose to harden my heart against God, He will not stop trying to soften my heart. He will probably bring more and more things into my life for that purpose. But if I continue to harden my heart, it can be figuratively said that God hardening it, for He is the One bringing those things into my life.

Can you see that? God is doing things in my life for the purpose of getting me to turn to the Truth. He wants to soften my resistance to Him. But if I choose to respond to those things by further hardening myself against God, then in a figurative sense it can be said that God is doing the hardening.

This is especially understandable when you consider that God already knows what I'm going to do. So if God knows I am going to refuse Him, and yet He continues to bring those things over which I harden myself, then it is easily said that God is doing the hardening -- even though the choice is actually mine.

In Romans 1 we saw this clearly illustrated. In verse 24, 26, and 28, we find that God "gives people up to" all manner of terrible things. Why? Because He somehow ordained them to these things? No. He gives them up to these sinful things because that's what they have chosen. They have continually hardened themselves against God. In response, God has, as it were, "turned up the juice" on His loving chastisements and judgments, trying to save them. But if they respond back to God by further hardening themselves, God has no choice but to give them up to what they desire -- not because that is what God wills -- but because things have reached the point where that is the only possible outcome of their choosing. Yet even then, God will seek to use their sin to bring them to repentance. He is an eternal Redeemer.

To say that God ordains anyone to be condemned requires much distortion of scripture, and a "redefining" of the clear teaching of the Bible on the Father heart of God. But what about the issue of the sovereignty of God? If I refuse salvation, does that make me more powerful than God? Isn't that what Paul is asking in verse 9:19, above? No, it doesn't make me more

powerful than God. If I refuse salvation, then it was God who made it possible for me to refuse in the first place. Only a sovereign God could grant such freedom of choice. Indeed, only a sovereign God who is able to accomplish His purposes despite the free will of a creation to refuse Him would dare create us able to do so. God is sovereign. Free-will proves it, rather than disproves it.

Paul's question in the above passage must be taken in context. He has just told us that it is God who calls one person for one purpose, and another for another purpose. He has just established that it was God who chose Israel over all the other nations, and Israel over Esau. Then he says that God chose Pharaoh -- for what purpose? "...that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." God did not preordain Pharaoh's choice -- that is -- God did not cause Pharaoh to refuse Him. But God knew that Pharaoh would harden his heart, because God knows all hearts. So God brought all those plagues and miracles upon Pharaoh, knowing the outcome. In this sense, God can be said to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh. But it didn't need to be so. Pharaoh COULD have chosen to obey God. If he had, then God still would have shown His power in Pharaoh -- by turning him to repentance. You see, God choose Pharaoh for the purpose of declaring His power. But Pharaoh choose HOW that power would be declared -- either by God's judgments, or by His mercy.

How does God still find fault? Well, the existence of this question should, by itself, tell us that predestination cannot be true. God COULDN'T find fault with someone who He personally ordains to wrath, could He? No. Even human justice tells us that. Think how silly it is to suppose that God creates certain individuals without any intention of saving them, indeed, with full intention of displaying His wrath upon them -- and then finds fault with them! Indeed, Jesus told us that if we cause someone to sin it is better that a millstone be hung around our neck and we be cast into the sea! How much more for God. God CAN still find fault because there IS fault there to find. God could not be just otherwise.

The doctrine of predestination denies the finished work of Christ and is ignorant of the fact the God, in Christ, has taken full and unconditional responsibility for sin. It is a doctrine which has been debated for centuries. None of these scriptures are new to the argument. Those who believe in predestination have their answers for them. But it is impossible to reconcile this teaching to the other great Truths of the Word.

But on with the above passage. Verse 20 pictures a vessel of wrath

asking God, "Why have you made me thus?" Paul seems to answer that this vessel of wrath has no business asking God such a question. He seems to say, "God is sovereign and you are a vessel of wrath. You were made to be fitted to destruction, and to glorify God in that way. So be quiet and let God be God."

Now let's think about this for a moment. If a "vessel of wrath" is as predestination teaches -- that is -- is someone who God has no intention of calling to Christ, then why would such a person ask this question of God to begin with? If I am not called of God, am I going to protest to Him as to why He made me to be a person who doesn't want Jesus Christ? No way. Anyone who would protest such a thing is clearly betraying the fact that, deep in their heart, they DO want Christ. They don't want to be a vessel of destruction. And even those who preach predestination would admit that those who are "vessels of destruction" would never do that! A "vessel of destruction" is never someone who asks God for salvation, only to be refused. According to strict predestination teaching, a "vessel of destruction" is one who is so ordained to wrath that they will never ask for salvation to begin with!

The question here is this: Are the "vessels unto honor," and the "vessels unto dishonor," the kind of vessels they are by God's hand, or by their own choice? Clearly, they are the kind of vessels they are by their own choice. It's not that any of us can decide to be a "vessel of honor," mind you. But God ordains ALL to be vessels of honor. Once He does ordain that in my case, and calls me to the Truth, then I do have a choice as to what I become because of it.

Paul's picture of the potter's wheel shows this. He says, "Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (verse 20) This sounds like God is deciding whether the vessel formed will be unto honor or wrath. But again, we must not allow our thinking to be distorted by the idioms inherent in the original languages. God is really saying, "You are a lump of clay. I am putting you on My potter's wheel. Now, through testing, proving, and everyday living, I am going to form you into something. I have foreordained you unto life. But if you decide to resist what I want to make, then it is possible that you will turn out to be a vessel unto wrath. That is your choice."

Does this deny the sovereignty of God? No. God IS sovereign. He is not going to deviate from the kind of vessel He wants to form of us. In fact, He is so committed to this that if we resist Him we will become a vessel of destruction. Thus we see the unwavering sovereignty of God, yet the choice

of man as to whether to come under that sovereignty.

Thus we see that God HAS indeed made the vessel unto wrath. He has made it because He would not deviate from His purpose despite that vessel's refusal to surrender. Then the vessel of wrath asks his question of God, "Why have you made me this way?" God's reply is, "Because I am sovereign and you would not come under My sovereignty. The only possible way for you to turn out in that case was to become a vessel of wrath; a vessel upon whom My judgment must come.

The sovereignty of God in these verses is not expressed by saying that God ordains some to wrath and some to salvation. It is expressed by showing that God ordains all to salvation -- but only through His One Way and sovereign purpose. HOW the clay responds to that eternal purpose plays a big part in what kind of vessel they become. Therefore, in the end, if someone asks God, "Why have you made me thus?," God's answer will be, "Because I am God and I had ONE purpose for you. You chose to refuse that purpose. Therefore My will and purpose in your life became something which hardened you, and formed you into a vessel of wrath." Thus we see a similar Truth as was the case with Pharaoh: God hardens the heart, not because He wants it hard, but by continually bringing Truth and life to one who will not receive it.

In the end, even the vessels of wrath will glorify God, but not because they accepted Him. They will glorify Him because by their refusal, His greatness will be all the more evident. This was never God's highest will for them. But now it must be, because God has ordained the power of choice.

9:24 Even us, whom He has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.

9:25 As He says also in Hosea, "I will call them My people which were not My people, and her beloved which was not beloved."

9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, "You are not My people, there shall they be called the children of the living God."

9:27 Isaiah also cries concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved."

9:28 For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness, because

a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

9:29 And as Isaiah said before, "Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah."

Paul begins to set the stage for his discussion of God's purpose in bringing in the Gentiles, and the fact of Israel's unbelief. Now notice this fact, as we leave the issue of predestination: Paul is going to show that all Israel will yet be saved. (see 11:26) He is going to show that even though Israel initially rejected God, and God turned to the Gentiles, that Israel will again be brought in. So ask: Does that sound like God ordains some to wrath and some to salvation? Or does it sound like the purpose of an all-loving and long-suffering God who ordains ALL to salvation? Obviously, the latter. Furthermore, as we read through the rest of chapter nine, as well as ten and eleven, ask yourself this question: WHO is the Israel Paul is talking about? Clearly, it is natural Israel, the original people of God. But what about all the Israelites who have died since God's calling of their nation? Are only those alive when Israel is brought in to be saved?

It is clear when we read the epistles that we make a mistake when we limit the purposes of God to a six-thousand year period. There is much redemption to be worked out once this age is ended. It is wise and helpful to keep this in mind with regard to Israel in these chapters.

9:30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith?

9:31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness?

9:32 Wherefore? Because they sought it, not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone.

9:33 As it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and Rock of offense. And whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed."

This passage clearly shows that Christians are not required to keep the Old Testament law. Keeping it cannot cause you to attain righteousness. The only way to attain to the righteousness of God is through faith in the

embodiment of all righteousness, Jesus Christ.

Those who seek to maintain a righteousness before God through works will always end up stumbling over Christ. Why? Certainly not if being "in Christ" means we have to keep the law! No. We'll stumble because we'll find that all of our law-keeping is worthless. We'll find that the law is nothing more than a mirror which shows us our sin, and that our only hope is to believe and rest in the grace of God in Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Rock. He is a Rock upon which to stand, or He is a Rock which will cause us to stumble. Which He is to us depends upon whether we stand by faith, or walk by the works of the law.

Romans

Chapter 10

No Difference Between Jew and Greek

This chapter continues the theme of chapter 9. Paul shows that the eternal gospel is not limited to some exclusive group, not even to God's own chosen Israel. Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord; confesses Him as Savior, shall be saved.

10: 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

This is an interesting verse. The Bible says that it is God's desire that all men be saved and come into the knowledge of the Truth. Paul wrote this to Timothy. (see I Tim. 2:4) So why did Paul pray that God would save Israel, that is, why did Paul ask God to do what he knew God already wanted to do?

This touches upon a question which perplexes many. Why bother asking God, "Thy will be done?" Isn't He going to do "His will" anyways? I mean, if God isn't going to do "His will" anyways, then we have a God who has a will He ISN'T doing -- a contradiction. We have a God who is frustrated because He wants to do certain things, but can't, until someone gets around to asking Him.

First, we must understand that God -- while eternally sovereign -- has chosen to limit Himself to working through human instruments. This doesn't mean that He won't work OUTSIDE of human instruments -- thank God for that -- but it does mean that His basic desire is to work through us. Why? Because God's eternal purpose is to raise sons and daughters who bear the likeness of Christ. He wants those who are so totally yielded to Him that He live, move, and work through them. This could not be accomplished if all

God ever did was work UPON us, or FOR us.

God wants us to pray for things He already wants to do so that we might grow to more and more be an instrument in His hands. This is part of our spiritual growth for the eternal ages. What we are doing now in these matters is only a shadow of what it corresponds to in eternity.

If we are to become one with God, it means we must grow to share His longings and desires. Our will must become His will. It is therefore only natural that we should make such statements as Paul makes in the above verse. If God's great desire is for Israel to be saved, then how could Paul's be anything else? As we grow in Christ, we will naturally long to see the will of God accomplished in the lives of all men.

This brings us to a second point. If God's desire is that all men be saved, then why won't all of them be saved? If God's desire is for all Israel to be saved, then why doesn't He just come down and save them all? Isn't God going to answer Paul's prayer?

God is going to have His will. But He has chosen, as the totally sovereign Creator of man, to allow man to refuse that will. This means that even though God DESIRES that all men be saved, not all will be saved -- they will chose otherwise. The same goes for Israel. God has done everything He can do to bring His will to pass. But man must also choose.

Does that mean that man's choice can abort the will of God? Not at all. God is going to have His will. If He doesn't get it through one man, He'll get it through another. If one part of His creation rejects Him, He'll raise up another. God will force Himself upon no one. But He shall have His way. Whether we come along with Him -- or not -- is up to us.

10: 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

There is probably no greater recipe for disappointment then the condition described in this verse. To have "a zeal of God," but to have it without much knowledge of Him, or without a surrender to Him, is always going to lead me into misinterpreting Him, or worse, into walking contrary to His will altogether. "A zeal for God," mind you, is good. But it does not mean I'm in a condition of surrender to His will. The disappointment will reveal the Truth. Zeal which is surrendered will always surrender all the more, if disappointed. But zeal motivated by self-will may all the more go it's own religious, legalistic way. Israel had a great zeal for God. They still do. They wouldn't have been involved in the temple worship, or have waited so eagerly for the Messiah. But

when He came, they rejected Him. Their zeal had not made room for the kind of Messiah He was -- one which had to die in order for them to receive what God had for them.

10: 3 For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

10: 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

Israel had a "zeal" for God, and it resulted in what "zeal without knowledge" usually results in: Trying to do for myself what only God can do for me. In this case, instead of accepting Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Saviour; as their righteousness, Israel sought to establish their own righteousness through the works of the law.

We must notice the seriousness of what Paul is saying. It isn't just that Israel ignorantly sought to establish their own righteousness -- this they did. But in doing so they actually refused to submit to the righteousness of God. They did this because they were hardened in their ignorance of what the righteousness of God is.

Imagine it. The Truth Himself was in their midst. They saw Him; heard Him speak. They had God living amongst them. And they called Him the Devil.

This type of refusal of God is never because I don't have all the facts. It is based in ignorance, but held in place by a heart which refuses to be exposed for what it is. The only way to learn about the righteousness of God is by allowing His righteousness to expose all of my unrighteousness. This I can never do by trying to establish my own righteousness through the keeping of laws, rules, and principles.

There are many Christians who are in the condition spoken of here by Paul. They have a zeal for God. They want Him -- but on their own terms. No, would never say that, or admit it to themselves, but it proves to be true when God begins to touch their spiritual pride; when He begins to expose them as spiritually bankrupt. When He does, they draw back and try to "cover their nakedness" by keeping more laws; by trying harder to be righteous. May God deliver us from such terrible deception!

Christ is the END -- or as the Greek intends it -- THE FULFILLMENT of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes and rests in Him. This means that I don't need to do anything to be righteous. I already am

righteous in Him.

Some Christians have become so conditioned in their thinking that they object to teaching such as this, saying that it leads to license. But if I still think that resting in Christ as my righteousness leads to license, then I have not yet seen the Truth of the grace of God. I can't have seen it. I would not be gravitating back and forth between law-keeping and license as the only two alternatives if I had seen it.

10: 5 For Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, "That the man which does those things shall live by them."

10: 6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise: "Say not in thine heart, 'Who shall ascend into heaven -- that is -- to bring Christ down from above.'

10: 7 Or, 'Who shall descend into the deep -- that is -- to bring up Christ again from the dead.'

10: 8 For what says it? "The Word is nigh you, even in your mouth, and in your heart, that is, the Word of faith which we preach."

Moses said that if a man keeps all of the law it will result in life because of his perfect works. This is true. But the other side of it is that if a man fails in even the smallest point, he is guilty of all, and must die. And all have failed. It therefore leaves us with nowhere to go except to the righteousness which is by faith in Christ -- exactly where God intended the law to bring us.

The righteousness of faith does not expect us to work our way up to heaven by our works, or to work to effect a resurrection. Our works cannot reach God, or do any of these things. No. Faith knows that the Word of God, Jesus Christ Himself, already lives in us. He is here, not because of works, but solely by the initiating grace of God.

Get that. How do I find God? How do I reach God? Not by anything I do. Not even by believing hard enough to reach up to heaven and pull Him down. I "find" God by believing He has already found me. I simply rest in the fact that He is already here.

Imagine going on a long trip to search for my earthly father, only to arrive home to discover that he had been there all the time. How foolish I'd feel. And what a waste of time. But this is what we all do spiritually. God says, "I'm not in a group, a church, or in any place you can reach through your

works. My kingdom is within you. (see Luke 17:21) I've come to live in you solely by My grace. Now simply believe and rest in that."

10: 9 That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

10:10 For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Notice the progression given in these verses: First, the Word is nigh you, even in your mouth, and in your heart -- that is -- the Word of faith. Second, BECAUSE OF THAT, if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart, you shall be saved. In other words, the only reason I can confess with my mouth, or believe with my heart, is because the Word of faith has been placed there by God in the first place. I cannot initiate my own salvation by one day deciding to confess words or by saying I believe in Christ. Parroting a creed, or reciting a "sinner's prayer," does not insure salvation. Unless God creates the condition of heart necessary to confess and believe, solely by His sovereign grace, a man will have nothing TO confess or believe.

Some of us have trouble believing this. We still think that we must somehow generate the faith necessary to attract God towards us. We still think we must take the initiative for our salvation. But there is nothing more contrary to the fundamental Truth of the gospel! Remember Adam in the garden after he sinned? He had rejected his Creator. But who initiated contact with God after Adam's sin? Did Adam? Did Adam wander around crying out to God, "Oh God, save me! I confess my sin. I believe in your forgiveness!?" No. Adam was hiding; afraid of God. He had no intention of trying to find God. Indeed, his sin had brought such a complete spiritual death upon him that there was nothing left in him to "try to find God." Yet GOD came seeking out Adam. GOD initiated the first contact. So it is today. Man is dead. He has no life in himself which can provide the first spark of a spiritual contact with God. God does it all. He even imparts to us the measure of faith necessary to get us going.

Jesus said, "No man can come to me except the Father who sent Me draw Him." (John 6:44) He also said, "You did not choose Me. I chose you." This clearly shows the Truth that it is God who must take the initiate to draw man to salvation, indeed, to draw us into all the Truth after salvation. But it does

not mean that man has no choice. God puts the Word of faith in us. But we must still yield to it. God puts the Truth in our mouth and in our heart. But we must still choose to confess it with our mouth and believe it with our heart. That He will not do for us.

There are other misunderstandings about what these verses say. Some use them to show that my faith is what saves me. If I just exercise my faith, they say, God will respond. But as wrong as it may at first sound, my faith never saves me. It is Jesus Christ who saves me. God reveals that Truth to me, and "my faith" simply believes it, and responds to God by receiving Him.

Let's expand on this. Christ has already won my salvation. That is a finished victory. And as shocking as it may sound, it is a finished victory -- whether I believe it or not. Now, what does that statement really mean, "whether I believe it or not?" It simply means that God has forgiven and reconciled the entire human race to Himself through Christ -- and all the unbelief in creation cannot alter that fact. God accomplished this for each of us while we were yet sinners and enemies, not just once we believed. If I refuse to believe it, the eternal fact of Christ's victory for me nevertheless stands. My unbelief, ignorance, bad works, or anything else, cannot undo what Christ has done for me.

Now, don't misunderstand. The fact of Christ's finished victory does nothing to negate the necessity for faith. I MUST believe and embrace what Christ has done or it will do me no good. I must embrace the Saviour by faith or I cannot be saved.

It is important to be clear about this: My faith doesn't get God to save me. It doesn't get Him to do anything. My faith simply embraces the fact that He's already done it, and brings me into contact with the Resurrection Himself. That's how I get saved. I am brought into contact with the Author of new life. Through faith, I embrace the finished victory He's already won.

Imagine inheriting a million dollars from your father. The money is placed into your bank account. It's THERE. You have total access to it, free of charge and without conditions attached. Now, what if you don't believe it's there? What if you don't believe, even after you are read the will, and see your bank statement? Will it do you any good? No. Your refusal to believe the Truth means your condition remains just as if the Truth were not the Truth. You might as well have not inherited a cent.

It is like this with salvation. God gives it to all men free of charge. No, He doesn't reveal the Truth of salvation to everyone all at once, but the fact of salvation is nevertheless eternally in place for all men. When the Truth is revealed to a person, God has already prepared them with the measure of

faith. At that point they must choose whether to believe or refuse. In this we see that faith is not an emotional issue, or simply a matter of "having all the facts." It is a moral issue. To believe, a man must make a moral decision to embrace Christ by giving his own self to Him -- unconditionally.

God does not hold us responsible for being born dead in Adam. Neither does He hold us responsible for digging our way out of the grave into the salvation of His Son. But He does hold us responsible for embracing the Truth of His free gift of salvation once He reveals it to us. In effect, no one will suffer eternal separation from God due to ignorance or a technicality. Those who suffer that awful fate will do so because they saw the Truth and rejected it in favor of something else.

This principle holds for more than salvation. It carries through into all of the dealings of God. God really has given us -- Christians -- all things freely in Christ. He's already won for us the whole package. But as He unfolds it to us through the Christian walk, it is up to us as to whether we will value and receive what He has given. If we will not receive it, God does not yank it back from us. We simply remain as one who has received an inheritance, but who has chosen to neglect it in favor of something else. We eventually become hardened towards those things which God has given to set us free.

10:11 For the Scripture says, "Whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed."

10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.

10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If we had only these three verses, we might conclude that it is up to us to initiate contact with God by crying out to Him. The Bible often does speak of "seeking God," and of "calling upon His name." But we must always take the full revelation of scripture in interpreting any passage. How could I possibly cry out to One for help unless a revelation had been planted in me regarding His mercy? I could not. Only if God makes Himself known to me FIRST, can I have the slightest faith or knowledge to cry out to Him. Only if the Father FIRST draws me to the Son, can I come to Him.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And

10:14 how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written:

10:15 "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who

10:16 has believed our report?"

These verses ask the question we have been discussing: How can anyone believe without hearing Truth? How could I possibly believe God unless the Truth about Him was first revealed to me?

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

10:17

This is our answer: Faith comes...how? By positively confessing a teaching over and over? No. By memorizing Bible verses? No. By saying the right words? No. By HEARING. You have to HEAR Truth before you can believe it. And in order for you to HEAR it, someone -- outside of yourself -- must initiate to speak it to you.

If we reverse the words in this verse we can bring out a clearer meaning as to what God is getting at. Let's read it as, "The Word of God genders hearing, and hearing genders faith." Now we can see it. The Word of God, that is, the Truth He reveals by His Spirit, gives birth to a hearing heart in me. It makes me fit for the greater reception of His Truth. And that hearing heart is really what leads to faith -- faith which is able to believe and rest in God Himself, and the Truth He reveals.

It is important to grasp the fact that the "Word of God" spoken of here is not simply "the Bible." The Bible is the written Word of God. But behind it is the Living Word. There is a big difference. To give an example, suppose you possessed a book about trees. Would you possess the trees? No. Even though everything your book said about trees was the truth, it still isn't the same as actually possessing, touching, and experiencing the real trees. So it is with the Bible. It is God's inspired Word. But it's a dead thing. The reality behind it -- those things the Bible describes and reveals -- those are the living things. Thus, the "Word of God" which genders hearing is not simply the written Bible, as inspired as it is. The real "Word of God" is the reality of which the Bible speaks, indeed, Christ Himself.

10:18 But I say, "Have they not heard?" Yes, verily. Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

10:19 But I say, "Did not Israel know?" First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you."

10:20 But Isaiah is very bold, and says, "I was found of them that sought Me not. I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me."

10:21 But to Israel he says, "All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

Note the tone of these verses. Who is seeking whom? Who takes the initiative to seek out the Gentiles, indeed, stretch out His hands to Israel? God. It is God who is seeking man. He is not sitting in heaven waiting for us to find Him. If only we could see this Truth and stand in it. It is the root of the gospel of grace.

Israel did refuse to believe God despite His revelation of Himself to them. But even then, God has not given up on them. He intends to use the Gentiles to eventually turn them to Himself.

Expanded Commentary on Romans 10:17

Faith is essential if we are to walk with Jesus Christ. In fact, in Hebrews, we read:

But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Heb. 11:6)

The Greek text actually reads, "APART from faith it is impossible to please Him." In other words, nothing a person does is of any value if that person is doing it APART – separate from – faith. Thus, all that a person does must be from out of, and the result of, faith in God.

So, we need to ask, "What is faith?"

Faith is never a thing unto itself. Indeed, faith isn't a THING at all. Neither is faith a FORCE that a believer receives from, or generates up to God. Faith is a RELATIONSHIP. All faith is toward God Himself – faith is in the Person of Jesus Christ.

This means that, yes, we believe everything that God has said. But more than that, we believe that God is FAITHFUL and TRUE. When everything is said and done, faith is a rest upon the character of God.

For example, how do you know you are saved? Many Calvinists will tell you that you can know you are saved – you can know that you are one of the elect – by looking at yourself for evidence. Do you love God? Do you desire His Son? Well, they will say, that proves you are saved – it proves you have been regenerated through election. But this is error – because you could be self-deceived.

So how do you know you are saved? There is only one way: By believing Jesus Christ – by believing that HE is faithful and true. Jesus said, "Believe on Me and you will be saved." Believe – and then trust that HE is faithful Who has promised.

Can we see that this puts the entire issue of faith on whether GOD is faithful? That this puts assurance of salvation, not upon any evidence we think we see in ourselves, but upon the faithfulness and trueness of God Himself?

This illustrates the nature of faith. Faith is NOT trust in my faith. Faith is not trust in my discernment of myself. No. Faith is simply trust that God is faithful.

How Faith Comes to Be

***So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”
(Rom. 10:17)***

How does a person come to, “have faith,” in God? Romans 10:17, above, tells us. But let’s notice a couple of things about this verse. First of all, when Paul says that, “faith comes,” what is he talking about? He’s talking about faith coming TO BE -- IN you and in me. Faith is not, “out there,” hanging in the air. Faith comes to be IN people. Faith is a relationship. So when he talks about, “faith coming to be,” he is talking about faith coming to be IN US.

But also notice the phrase: “...so then faith COMES”. How many see that this very small phrase tells us point blank -- that faith MUST COME. In other words, faith is not in you and I to begin with. No. Paul says, “So then faith COMES” – this is proof that it has to COME. Faith has to come TO BE in you and I -- it is not there to begin with.

Now, that opens up another important Truth. If faith needs to come to BE in you and I -- can we see that this means that true faith does not originate from you and I as the source? Can we see that we are wasting our time trying to, “muster up,” faith from out from ourselves? There is no faith in us, by nature, to, “muster up.”

There is no faith born into the Adamic race. When you and I were born into this world, we did not have any life in us, nor Truth, and therefore, we did not have any faith in us. It is absolutely impossible for a human being -- left to himself in Adam -- to produce any faith at all unto God. Period.

Now you CAN have human faith – you CAN have religious faith. You can create out of your human imagination a religion -- even a version of Christianity. You can create a (false) CHRIST out of your imagination and think that this is the one who is in you -- and you can put your human faith in that and think this is real faith. People do this kind of thing all the time. But it is not real. It is of human origin -- and true faith is NEVER of human origin.

True faith has to COME TO BE in you and I, which means that the source of true faith has to be from One OTHER THAN OURSELVES -- namely, Jesus Christ. Faith has to come to be -- from the outside of us -- into the inside of us from the outside. Of course it does. This is how Jesus needs to come. I don’t know how many times God has to tell us, and to repeat this over and over again, that no one has anything of value except that which is received from ABOVE. (see John 3:27)

So faith has to come to be in you and I. Now, how does it come to be in you and I? Well, Romans 10:17 tells us: Faith comes to be in us by hearing -- and more specifically -- by hearing the Word of God.

We cannot take the time here to refer back to the opening chapter of this book. God is speaking Christ. HE is the Living Word of God. Thus, rather than focus on THINGS we say God is speaking, we need to realize that when all is said and done that God is speaking and revealing a PERSON.

Now notice: Faith comes by HEARING – but HEARING demands that someone is speaking – or else there would be nothing TO hear. In other words, I cannot believe unless God speaks. That is what Romans 10:17 is saying: Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

God Almighty has to take the initiative to reveal to us Truth; to reveal to us Christ. It is only if He does this -- which we may refer to as speaking or revealing Jesus Christ to us – it is only then that we can HEAR – for only then is there anything TO hear. Then, IF we hear, faith is born.

Faith is a relationship. It is the relationship with God of faith -- and as I have noted -- this is initiated by God when He brings light, or when He speaks and reveals the Truth about Himself. Now if -- and this is a big IF -- we embrace the light and Truth which God brings, then the reality of faith will come TO BE IN US individually.

Truth Makes Hearing Possible

Now, someone is going to ask the, “chicken or egg,” question -- “If faith comes by hearing the Word of God, then how do you get enough faith to hear the Word of God?”

Notice that Romans 10:17 does NOT say that initially you must have faith to hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says that faith COMES BY HEARING the Word of God. So, the correct order is this: God reveals, we hear, and faith comes to be.

So, the question really is this, “How can a person who has no faith HEAR God? The answer is found, not in the one who needs to hear, but in the One who is speaking. When God speaks it awakens a person – the spirit of God makes us to know enough to turn and hear. When God speaks to you and to me, it can penetrate any blindness, any deafness, or any darkness. God’s voice can open ears and eyes.

But God is not going to violate free will. How many notice that in the Bible, God never makes anyone think or do anything? It simply says that God brings light -- and that light will make it possible for us to see and to hear. It does not force us to embrace the Truth or to believe God.

Substance and Evidence

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and evidence of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

We have seen that, "faith comes by hearing the Word of God." Then the above verse adds that real faith IS substance or evidence. But substance and evidence of what? Well, if faith COMES by hearing what God reveals, then this same faith is substance and evidence of what God reveals. In other words, the faith that comes to be in you and I is – spiritually – the substance and evidence IN US of what God has spoken.

Hebrews is telling us that God works IN US – He reveals and we hear – and faith comes to be in us. But because that faith finds its source in what God has spoken, then it is substance and evidence IN US of what God has revealed.

This brings us to a couple of other conclusions. Number one: you cannot have the faith of Jesus Christ for anything except what HE has faith for -- because it's the faith OF Jesus Christ. Or, to put it another way, if faith comes to be in us because God has spoken, and we have heard, then you can't have faith for anything but the Truth that God has spoken.

So, we can do away with the false teaching that if you want something, all you need to do is confess it, brainwash yourself into thinking that you will receive it, and you will receive it. No, you don't get to initiate these things. Faith does not come by SPEAKING or confessing. Faith comes by hearing what GOD speaks – which puts everything within HIS WILL.

Now, what does all of this tell us? It tells us that we need not waste our energy asking God to give us more faith. He never will. We really need to ask God to speak to us more of Christ; more of the Truth. And then keep our hearts open to HEAR. Do that and faith will come to be in us.

Believing God

Let us hold fast the profession of [our] faith without wavering; (for he [is] faithful that promised.) (Heb. 10:23)

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him [was] called Faithful and True. (Rev. 19:11)

When all is said and done, we must ALL answer the question: Is God faithful and true? But not merely in general – but is God faithful and true to us personally and individually? Does God ALWAYS tell the Truth? Can we absolutely trust and rely upon God to be faithful, keep His Word, and do what is best of us? Can we risk our life on Him?

Well, if we do believe all of those wonderful things about God, then we have the beginning of faith. But faith must be tested – it must be proven. Faith

must be lived out. Thus, if we believe God -- we are going to act like it. We are going to live accordingly – in both the good times and the bad times. But more than that, if we truly believe God we are going to give ourselves to Him in Christ – unconditionally.

Can we see that true faith will always carry us to abandon ourselves to Jesus Christ? We will lose ourselves to Him – we will learn to REST in the fact that He is faithful.

Faith in Jesus Christ – based on the Truth that God reveals – is initially exercised when we accept Christ as our personal Savior. We believe and know that we are saved because Jesus said so – and He is faithful Who has promised. This is a principle that carries through into all facets of the Christian walk, because Jesus Christ never changes.

Romans
Chapter 11
Of Him, Through Him, and To Him

In reading the last several chapters, it might be easy to conclude that God has indeed cast off Israel because of their unbelief, and now turned His attention towards the Gentiles. But Paul wants to make sure that this is not the conclusion drawn from his teaching. God has NOT cast off Israel. In truth, Israel cast off God. Yet despite that, God will yet have His way with them. "One proof of that," Paul assures, "Is the fact that I, myself, am an Israelite. And God saved me." In other words, if Paul, an Israelite, is saved, then the same gift of grace is given to all Israel, as well as to the Gentiles.

- 11: 1 I say then, has God cast away His people? God forbid. For I am also an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.**
- 11: 2 God has not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture says of Elijah? How he makes intercession to God against Israel, saying,**
- 11: 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars, and I am left alone, and they seek my life.**
- 11: 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.**
- 11: 5 Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**

Verses 11:2-5 recount an instance from the Old Testament where a prophet of God thought that surely he alone was the only one left following God. God told him otherwise. The point is, God is not idly sitting by, watching Israel, or the world, go down the drain. Even though things look terribly hopeless, God is at work. He has people He has called.

- 11: 6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works. Otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace. Otherwise work is no more work.**

This verse makes no provision for a Christianity wherein salvation, or even God's on-going favor and fellowship, is based upon a mixture of grace and works. My Christianity is either one or the other: OF grace, or OF works.

This Truth raises some pretty serious questions about versions of Christianity out there which ARE a mixture of grace and works. Christians by the thousands believe they are saved by grace, but must maintain their salvation by works. Others believe they are saved by grace, but must earn their reward by works. Then there are those who believe that they are both saved by grace, and kept in God's favor by grace -- but don't live like it. They live in fear, condemnation, and continue guilt -- even though they will tell you they believe the doctrines which teach otherwise. The question therefore becomes: Are these mixtures of Christianity and legalism -- of grace and works -- are these Christianity at all?

This is a question we dare not become too dogmatic about. The reason is that Paul writes to the Galatians, Colossians, and even these Romans -- all of whom were trying to establish themselves by their works. Yet he never says they are not saved, or not real Christians. Rather, he admonishes them to begin living IN the grace which saved them. God alone can judge whether a person has truly embraced Christ.

11: 7 What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for, but the election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

11: 8 (According as it is written, "God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day.)

11: 9 And David said, "Let their table be made a snare and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them.

11:10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.

Israel has not obtained that for which they sought. This reminds us of a teaching of Jesus. He said, "Many will seek to enter into life but will not be able." His statement is shocking because we have all believed that those who seek the Lord will find Him. So why will MANY seek to enter life, yet FEW find it? Simply because they will seek to enter into life on THEIR OWN

TERMS. Get that. It is actually possible to seek God -- to seek eternal life -- and yet do it all on our own terms.

Jesus spoke of this possibility many times. He said, "This people draws near unto Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But IN VAIN do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:8-9) The "commandments of men" always reflect the terms upon which WE want to enter into life. For Israel, and for most of us who have walked in legalism, those "terms" are almost always some form of legalism -- some terms which WE, by our works, can meet. We SEEK God, yes, but we do it on our terms -- setting the criteria which we feel will qualify us for eternal life.

Jesus also spoke of the outcome of continuing on with God under our own terms. He pictured those who, at the last judgment, would "weep and nash their teeth." Why are they doing this? Because they have been cast into outer darkness when they wanted the inner light. They hunger and long for that which they have lost. They see it and realize they are totally unable to receive it. Because they lived life in Christ under their own terms, not allowing God to do in them a work which would make living in the light possible, they can now live no other place except darkness.

It is one thing to confess Christ as Saviour, but quite another to allow my life to be governed by Him. All Christians must face this question: Will I walk with God on my own terms, or surrender unconditionally to His? The shocking fact revealed here in Romans is that legalism IS a reflection that I am walking with God on my own terms. I am walking with MY WORKS as the criteria, rather than the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid. But rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

11:12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?

Because Israel cast off God, God turned to the Gentiles. Yet this turning was not a rejection of Israel, but another purpose of God to bring them in. Paul then adds, "If Israel's fall resulted in this blessing for the world, just imagine what their eventual salvation will bring!"

Psalms 76:10 says that God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of that wrath -- that which He will NOT use to His praise

-- He will restrain. God will allow nothing that He does not intend to use for our eventual good. This Truth applies not only on the national level, as it does here in Romans, but it applies on the personal level. God does indeed work all things together for good -- even those things which, at the time, seem bad.

11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office.

11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead.

Paul repeats his statement of verses 11-12 in other terms. He shows again that God, rather than give up on Israel because of their rejection of the Truth, will use their rejection to draw the Gentiles. And if God's use of Israel's failure was wonderful, just think what His use of their eventual acceptance will be! It will be as life from the dead.

11:16 For if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy. And if the root be holy, so are the branches.

11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if you boast, you bear not the root, but the root thee.

Paul gives a caution here which we may also apply in a more general way. He says, "Don't take pride in your calling. You are still continually dependent on the Root." In other words, Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. We have nothing outside of Him.

Many Christians never seem to grasp the simple Truth that their calling has nothing to do with THEM. God did not look at me and decide that He would call me because of some quality I had, or because of my obedience, or even because of my faith. He called me because of HIS purpose, and

grafted me in. Only then was I able to believe, obey, and walk with Him. This is the gospel of grace.

11:19 Thou wilt say then, "The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in."

11:20 Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear.

11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Christians stand by faith, not in what we do, but in what Christ has done. That alone is our stand. Without that, we have nothing. That makes boasting total folly. But while faith is the simplest thing, it is also just as simple to forsake it. This is what Israel did, and what Paul warns against.

Notice that there is not a word in this passage about works. Faith is the issue. And again, it is faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us -- not in anything else.

11:22 Behold, therefore the goodness of and severity of God. On them which fell, severity, but towards thee, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also shall be cut off.

God continually offers His grace to His people. But WE must choose regarding it. We can continue in grace, standing by faith against all which comes against it, or we can choose something less. If we do choose something less, there is little God can do for us other than bring chastisements for the purpose of turning us from our errant way. Even then, there are apparently those who, despite all of God's efforts with them, will choose to refuse Him. God will not be able to help them, for their choice will make that impossible.

11:23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in.

11:24 For if thou were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own

olive tree?

Unbelief -- not imperfect works -- is the only reason why anyone will fail to become part of God's "olive tree." In other words, whether we do all the right things is not the issue. The issue is whether our faith in trust is in what Christ has done. That is the gospel in a nutshell.

Paul makes a good point in verse 24. If the Gentiles, certainly not a natural part of the "good" olive tree, are able to be grafted into it through Christ, then how much more easily it will be for Israel, who ARE a natural part, to be grafted in! God intends to have His way with Israel. It simply isn't yet time.

11:25 For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.

11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

11:27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

Paul wanted to caution the Gentiles against thinking themselves better than Israel, seeing as how Israel had rejected Christ, and they had accepted Him. He wants them, and us, to realize that God has a purpose in turning to the Gentiles. It is a purpose which will not omit Israel, but will, in the end, further their inclusion.

11:28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes, but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes.

11:29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Verse 29 carries a tremendous principle. It shows that what God gives is never withdrawn. Those He calls are never "uncalled." This statement alone proves the Truth of grace. How? Well, think about it. If God's favor -- in any way -- even remotely depended upon OUR works, or OUR faith, or upon anything at all about US, then His gifts and calling would have to carry the possibility of repentance. That's because anything based on US can fail. We know how undependable we are. But if God's favor depends entirely

upon HIMSELF, based upon what Christ has done, then there could be no repentance of them, for what Christ has done is finished. The only possible way God's calling and gifts could be without repentance is if they depend solely on His Son.

This also explains some of the abuses in the church regarding the ministry and the gifts. While God's gifts and calling are without repentance, that alone does not insure that His gifts and calling will be valued by those He calls. There are many, even though they have received salvation and gifts from God, have used those things for their own purposes. Instead of allowing God's calling to work His purpose in their lives, they have sought to use it to work their own purpose.

There is yet another Truth wrapped up in this verse. It has to do with what is often termed "the unpardonable sin." What is "the unpardonable sin" -- the only sin God cannot forgive? Well, the only sin God cannot forgive is the deliberate refusal of His forgiveness. Ultimately, this means a refusal of the means of God's forgiveness, Jesus Christ. But how do we reconcile "the unpardonable sin" with the fact that God's calling is without repentance? I mean, if God cannot forgive the refusal of Christ, isn't He withdrawing His gifts and calling if I refuse Christ?

No. And this is important to understand. If I refuse Christ, or refuse any other Truth which I have clearly seen, God does not, at that point, "yank" back what He has given me. Hardly. God's calling and gifts abide all the more. God is always there, calling and seeking to give to me what He desires. He will, however, not force them upon me. He'll allow me to continually refuse them. That is my choice. So these two Truths do go together. God never takes back what He freely gives. Indeed, that is the precise reason why, in the ultimate sense, we are terribly accountable if we continually persist in refusing it.

11:30 For as you in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief.

11:31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

11:32 For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.

Because Israel rejected God, God had mercy upon the Gentiles, for He

will have a people to glorify Him. Yet because God has had mercy upon the Gentiles, it will result in Israel being saved anyways. Such are the redemptive ways of God.

Once again we notice a great principle wrapped up in these verses: God allows nothing He does not intend to use. He will take even the unbelief of man and use it to bring others to believe. He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and what He cannot make to praise Him He will restrain. (see Psalm 76:10)

We see this at work everywhere today. Heresy of the worst kind is rampant, denying some of the most basic Truths. Yet God does not put a stop to it. Why? Because, "there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved (or genuine) may be made manifest among you." (see I Cor. 11:19) God even allows heresy to invade His church so that we might have the opportunity to stand against it, and in doing so, both learn and be strengthened in the Truth. In other words, if the Truth we hold is never challenged by error, it will have little chance of becoming an articulate and living thing.

It is important, however, to understand that God does not condone heresy, or false teachers. Because He USES these in a redemptive way it does not mean that they are redemptive things. For instance, Israel rejected God through unbelief. That's not a good thing. It's an awful thing. But once it happened, God used it to bring in the Gentiles. God takes the worst that man can offer and turns it into something redemptive.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the prime example of this principle. It was God's will that Christ die on the Cross. No event ever brought about greater blessing. But was it God's will that Judas betray Christ, that is, did God cause him to betray Jesus? No. Likewise, did God cause the Pharisees to deliver Christ up to the Romans because they were envious of Him? No. That was a terrible thing they did. It grieved the heart of God. But why, if the death of Christ was God's will, are those who put Him to death guilty of doing wrong?

To understand this, we need to draw a contrast between God's perfect will and His permissive will. In His perfect will, God wants many things. But this does not mean He gets them. No. He has ordained in that same perfect will that He will have a permissive will -- a permissive will which allows His creation to choose for themselves. And outside of His Son, no part of God's creation has ever chosen His perfect will. Yet God, in His wisdom and mercy, will take even the bad choices of men -- that which is in His permissive will -- and use them towards achieving His perfect will. But that does not

excuse those who choose to sin. It simply means that despite their choice, God got His way. He never loses.

Once of the most common ways God uses our sin is by allowing it's consequences to come upon us. This is not "punishment." It is chastisement. God is saying, "I love you. But because I do, I must allow your sin, your pride, and your self-righteousness, to all do a work upon you -- a work of depleting you of your own strength. Then, and only then, can you turn and receive what I want to give you."

We all have two choices continually before us: Either choose God's will and become conformed to it, or choose our own will and see God use our rebellion to accomplish His will outside of us. Regardless, God is going to have HIS way.

Verse 32, above, is not saying that God prefers unbelief. It is saying that unbelief IS. All men ARE in unbelief. That's why God has concluded such. He is currently trying to bring us to the SAME conclusion, that we might turn and receive what Christ has done.

Note that it says "unbelief," and not "law-breaking." Acts of sin are NOT the issue. Whether we turn to Christ for forgiveness from such, and rest in His finished work, IS the issue. Again, faith, and not works, is the gospel.

11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

11:34 For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor?

For God to use even the sin and unbelief of man to bring about His purposes and man's redemption is something for which we have no point of reference. Indeed, many Christians today would disagree that He even does so at all. Yet God's ways are indeed past our understanding.

11:35 Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

11:36 For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Consider verse 35 in light of the popular teaching that says "if you give to God, He will give back to you all the more." Such teaching is utterly contrary

to the gospel of grace, and to the Truth of God. God has first given, and His continual attitude towards man is, "Receive FIRST what I freely give, and then, and only then, can you have anything to pass along to others.

There is probably NO Truth which has been more distorted. Yet that one Truth, that we cannot first give to God, but that He must first give to us, is the essence of the gospel. It is remarkable that all heresy in some way mars this Truth, and exalts man as the one who must take the initiative to get God moving on our behalf.

Verse 36 belongs to verse 12:1, for it is the "therefore" of which that verse speaks. BECAUSE all things are OF God, THROUGH God, and TO God, and because all glory belongs to Him -- THAT is why we should present our bodies to Him as a token of our spiritual worship. It is the only possible outcome of a life which truly see God AS God, and is caught up in His eternal purposes. Those who value God will always give themselves to Him.

Romans

Chapter 12

A Living Sacrifice

The focus of the letter to the Romans now takes a new direction. Paul has discussed law vs. grace, and has explained how that Truth affects Israel. Now he turns to spiritual Israel, the church. Chapter 12 contains some practical revelation and advice on how the Body of Christ, and the individual, should function under the impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

12: 1 I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

"Reasonable service" can be translated "spiritual worship." Here we see what real worship is all about. It is giving myself wholly and unconditionally to God -- in and through all that I do. God wants those whom He can USE, yes, but more than that, He wants those through whom He can LIVE.

Note also that God wants a "living sacrifice," not a dead one. Practically speaking, this means our surrender to God is not only unconditional, it is totally voluntary. A LIVING sacrifice who puts himself on the altar can, at any time, take himself off the altar. A dead one can't. He is put there against his will. That's the compulsive idea of surrender which many Christians have. We surrender to God, but do it because we are afraid of what might come upon us if we don't. Or we surrender in hopes of obtaining a greater reward. But this is little more than "lip service." Real worship is in spirit and Truth. It is of the HEART. Only that kind of worship is truly holy and acceptable to God.

12: 2 And be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Verse 12:2 is really telling us HOW to practically live out the command of verse 12:1. If I want to present my body as a holy and acceptable living sacrifice to God, then I must not be conformed to this world. I must allow God to renew my mind according to the Truth.

Spiritual growth is the theme here. I must first present myself unconditionally to God as a living sacrifice. This will be the natural outcome of believing God and standing in the Truth by faith. Then, because I am

standing in Truth by faith, I must refuse to be moved by the world, or by anything else that contradicts the Truth. The eventual result will be the renewing of my mind, and the outworking of this renewal in the form of Christian character.

The original language is picturesque in verse 12:2. Christians are not to allow their behavior or thinking to be molded by the world. Instead, we are to allow God to use the world to transform us into the image and likeness of Christ. This is what it means to become a living sacrifice. I must allow God to DETACH me from this present realm, and ATTACH me to the eternal. This means I'll no longer live for this present life -- really, not just in theory -- but live for the eternal. This transformation will be the result of the renewal of my mind.

Many Christians wonder how they can know the will of God. Well, verse 12:2 tells us one way to know: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may PROVE what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." In other words, if I want to know the will of God I must BECOME the will of God. I must BECOME transformed in a way that will adjust my thinking and moral perspective to God's.

This is why God often will not answer us when we pray for certain things. "If God would just tell me what to do," we lament, "I'd just do it and everything would be all right." No. Information from God is not what we need. If God actually told us what we want to know we COULD NOT grasp it the way we must grasp it to fulfill His will. We'd either misunderstand it and cause ourselves worse trouble, or we'd fail to recognize it as being of God in the first place.

It is popular today for Christians to say, "The Lord told me to do this or that." Or, "The Lord prompted me to say this or that." And it is a fact that God does sometimes lead us like that. But while we should be grateful for any leading of God, the danger is to make a pattern out of what God occasionally does, and insist that He lead us that way continually. He will not, and Romans 12:1-2 says so. God's primary way of revealing His will to us is to reveal HIMSELF to us. As we grow to know God, we grow to know His will. As we BECOME the will of God through the renewal of our minds, we discern the will of God because we have gained His moral perspective.

12: 3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Some feel that this verse should not contain the words "of himself." In other words, we should not think more highly than we ought. Either way, the admonition is clear: Spiritual pride has no place in the life of one who has given himself to God. It must be crucified out of him upon the altar of sacrifice.

What is spiritual pride? It is defined here. It is thinking of myself more highly than I ought. Then, because of that thinking, it is assuming that I have certain gifts and a knowledge of God that I do not have. Many Christians have fallen into this trap. They are in positions of influence and authority in the church, despite the fact that God never intended them to be there. Instead of the love of God as their motivation, it is personal pride.

It is as sure as God Himself: True spiritual leadership and spiritual pride cannot co-exist. If a man is called of God, God will judge all spiritual pride in him. He'll then have to choose to either allow the Truth to slay his pride, to adjust the Truth to fit his pride. Those who choose the former may become true servants of God. Those who choose the latter will ultimately put themselves on the throne and will likely assume that anything which contradicts them cannot be of God.

God has given to every man a "measure of faith." This infers that for each measure there is an outlet, or a function in the Body of Christ. God is telling us that we should be content to operate within that measure. Doing so is true worship because it is a surrender to God's will.

Yet notice something here. Don't assume that the more visible and glorified positions in the Body of Christ are the ones which require the greater measure of faith. Sometimes those positions require little faith. It oftens takes the greater faith to remain unseen and seemingly wasted than it does to be in the limelight, working mightily for God.

12: 4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office,

12: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another.

Verses 12:4-5 are the reasons why we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. We are only one part of the whole scheme of the Body of Christ.

It is actually encouraging that "all members have not the same office." It

means I don't have to try to be like someone else. Neither does another member of the Body have any business trying to mold me into their own image. Each member is unique, yet part of the One Body.

What does God mean when He talks about "the Body of Christ." Too often we limit the term to the church which exists today. But the Body of Christ includes ALL who have been in Christ, either alive or asleep. Consequently, when God speaks of "the Bride making herself ready," He is NOT talking about the end-time church. He is talking about the "cumulative bride" which has been built for close to two thousand years. This is important to understand, for it is easy to say that the Bride cannot possibly be ready for Christ to come back. But if the Bride is more than what is present today, who is to say what "ready" really means? Who is to say what God requires before Christ returns?

In this section of Romans, Paul is going to talk much about the Body of Christ and it's functions and relationships. That might seem a strange conclusion to a letter which deals so much with law, grace, and God's chosen people. But it is actually the only possible conclusion. Paul discusses what he does in these latter chapters because, having shown his readers so much Truth, he must now show them it's practical outcome in the body of believers.

- 12: 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.**
- 12: 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth, on teaching.**
- 12: 8 Or he that exhorts, on exhortation. He that gives, let him do it with simplicity. He that rules, with diligence. He that shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**

The original language needs to be examined in this passage or we lose a bit of the meaning in King James English. Paul list here seven spiritual gifts, along with the motivation under which each should be carried out. In verse 12:6, the words, "let us prophecy" are not in the original. They do, however, properly convey the meaning. In verse 12:7, the words, "let us wait" are likewise not in the original, and it is a mystery as to why they are added. These two verses should simply say, "If we have the gift of prophecy, let us

exercise it according to the measure of faith God has given. If we have the gift of ministry (serving), let us likewise exercise it according to faith." In the next sentence, Paul simply repeats his admonition to exercise teaching and exhortation through faith as well.

What does God mean when He tells us to exercise our gifts "according to the proportion of faith?" Well, just think how it would be if we tried to exercise them OUTSIDE of the faith which God has given. You would have a bunch of people going around exercising gifts under the power of the flesh, and certainly outside of the will of God. Instead of staying within the limits of the gifts God has given, people would stray outside of those limits. In short, instead of allowing God to use the gifts through them to work His will, you'd have a group of people using the gifts to work their will -- although they'd CALL it "God's will."

Gifts which are exercised "according to the proportion of faith" cannot operate in the flesh because they operate from faith in Christ. Faith in Christ cannot do anything Christ isn't doing. Gifts which are based in faith cannot be abused and cannot be faked. They will work God's will to the edification of others.

If we read verse 12:3 through verse 12:8, we see clearly what Paul is getting at. He tells us not to become proud and arrogant about our faith, or about our gifts. He then tells us we need to stay within the limits of God's will in the exercising of the gifts, and to allow the gifts to operate as a by-product of our fellowship and walk with Christ.

Obedience to this passage would completely eliminate any individual taking it upon himself to be a teacher or leader in the church. No one, through spiritual pride, would appoint themselves as a "special person" who God uses in the lives of others. Obedience to this passage would also make me realize that I don't have to fret about not doing or operating the way someone else does. No. I have my gifts and another has his. We have gifts which differ according to our measure of faith, and according to God's purpose in us. The gifts operate according to the faith GOD gives, for His purposes, and through whom He chooses. That makes us all special and individual, yet it links us together as members of His Body.

Prophecy is not limited to foretelling the future. Indeed, there is very little of that at all in New Testament prophecy. Prophecy is the God-inspired utterance of Truth. It is the Holy Spirit cutting through confusion and human thinking; exposing things as they really are. Prophecy is the verbalization of how God see things.

There have been many abuses of prophecy in the church. Today we find

such things as "personal prophecy," that is, Christians giving "messages from God" to other Christians. But there is almost no example of this in the New Testament. Indeed, if we read I Corinthians 14, we find no mention of such a thing. Furthermore, when the gift of prophecy is manifested, it always carries certain characteristics. It is always uplifting and encouraging. Jesus Christ is the center. He is exalted and made more real. Never is prophecy filled with condemnation or fear. Never does it tell someone something specific they should do, like marry a certain person, or quit a certain job. Never does it glorify any man, any group, or flatter people in a way which is spiritually unhealthy. There are many teachings in the Bible about how we are to "test the spirits." We need to take them seriously. It is no light thing that someone claim to be speaking for God.

The gift of prophecy does not need to come in some strange, trance-like state. It may be manifested in ordinary conversation, without the vessel even knowing they are exercising the gift. Indeed, if we are walking closely with Christ, most of the gifts will come that way. They will be a by-product of our walk with Christ. That does not mean they won't come during a church meeting or a gathering. Paul tells us they do. But we cannot limit them to that setting -- or any setting for that matter.

The gift of ministry, or serving, may surprise us. We have probably been told we are ALL called to serve the Lord. And we are. So how does the gift of serving differ from the general calling to serve?

The gift of serving goes beyond the general call in that it involves a supernatural ability to edify others. This serving can take many forms. It is not limited to those who are officially ordained in some ministry. It is not learned by study. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching is the ability to tell other Christian what they already know. Notice that it is not the ability to tell them what they don't know. Why? Because, in Christ, I cannot relate information or facts to someone, and think I have taught them about God. No. Anyone can memorize facts, scripture, or doctrine. But only God can do a work in a person's heart which will condition them to receive true revelation. The teacher is the gift God uses, once He has conditioned our hearts, to bring articulation and rational understanding to all of it. A teacher puts into words and thoughts those abstract things which we previously could not seem to grasp in a tangible way.

The question, of course, is as to how the teacher himself gets his revelation. It is never by study, although study can give a point of reference and confirmation to revelation. A teacher gets revelation by passing through

various experiences with Christ, and emerging as one who has lived what he is about to teach. Of course all that a teacher shares is fully harmonious with the Bible. The Word of God is always the final confirmation. But living what the Word reveals goes far beyond simply knowing what it says.

Exhortation, as used here, is the same word which is used to describe the Holy Spirit, or "helper." It is "parakaleo." It means to "call to one's side." This gift is used by God to stabilize others in Christ. If I "exhort" someone, I am standing by their side, in Christ. I am allowing them to presently feed off of me, so that they might gain enough strength of faith to put me aside and begin feeding off Christ Himself.

The true gift of exhortation will have one goal in mind: To make myself obsolete as quickly as possible, and to get the other person into business with Christ for themselves. All the gifts are really to that end. They are never to be used to gain a following, or to glorify the vessel through whom they come.

We do not often think of "giving" as a gift. But it is. All Christians should, of course, realize that everything they own, and everything they ARE, belongs to God. As such, all that God allows us to have should be continually open to Him for His use. He can take it from us or let us have it. It is up to Him. Yet there is this gift of giving. Again, any gift of God is supernatural. If it were natural, it would be our gifts, not the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This makes the gift of giving a manifestation of the character of God which goes far beyond the norm for a Christian. It is the ability to impart to someone something of myself which will edify them in Christ.

Next Paul says, "He that RULES..." What is this gift? The word means "to stand before;" "to maintain;" "to guide;" "to lead." Basically, this is a God-given ability to be a pioneer for God. If I have this gift, I am used of God to be an example to others, to pave a way into greater revelation for others, to stand by faith where others may fall. This gift is sort of like being a "support post" of God's house. By my experience and example, I am able to lead other into keeping focused upon Christ.

Notice there is little about this gift which would entail "giving orders" to other Christians. No. Jesus says that if I want to lead I must be a slave. That means I must be available to God for use in the lives of others, just as a slave belongs to his master.

Mercy involves more than simply forgiving others for what they have done to me. In fact, this gift doesn't carry the meaning at all. The gift of mercy is the supernatural ability to feel as others feel; to empathize with them; to bear their burden. It involves intercession and the ability to become one with them

in their trials and in their joys.

Now we can restate the gifts and apply the more modern meaning to them.

Prophecy - the supernatural ability to expose something for what it is.

Ministry - the supernatural ability to serve God in the lives of others.

Teaching - the supernatural ability to verbalize to others what they already know in their heart.

Exhortation - the supernatural ability to be a stabilizing agent for Christ in the life of others, to the end that they might gain the strength to stand alone.

Giving - the supernatural ability to impart to others something of myself or my possessions, in a way that will edify them in Christ.

Leadership - the calling to be used of God as a pioneer and example which will draw others to Christ for themselves.

Mercy - the supernatural ability to empathize with others, and to bear their burdens with them.

12: 9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil. Cleave to that which is good.

Verses 12:9-21 describe various motivations under which the gifts are to be exercised, as well as the general way in which Christians are to behave themselves. Paul starts with "love." It is to be without "dissimulation," or, as the original says, "without pretense." We are apt to take this command lightly unless we realize the terrible potential in our own hearts. For love to be completely void of pretense we can have NO self-gain in mind -- not even the gain of a reward from God. No. Not even the admiration of others. Love which is without pretense is unconditionally committed to God's highest for

the object loved regardless of cost to them, or to me. It has one goal in mind: The will of God.

Abhorring that which is evil is a trait which many Christians fake, simply to assure themselves they are obeying this command. But I cannot abhor that which is evil until I see myself AS evil in the light of Jesus Christ. Until I do, I may abhor certain kinds of evil which naturally repulse me. But I'll nevertheless continue to harbor other kinds which appeal to me, secretly, even religiously, deep in my heart. The only way to obey these commands of God is by realizing my total need for the grace of God, and by coming to grips with what Jesus Christ has won for me through His own Blood.

Cleaving to that which is good will be the natural by-product of a heart which belongs to God. But notice the opposing ways in which Paul deals with evil and good in this verse. We are to "abhor" that which is evil, that is, avoid it like the plague. Yet we are to "cleave" to that which is good. Here we see a repetition of the command given in the garden. Adam was told to stay away from the forbidden tree. That's all he had to do. But he was also told that he was free to eat of every other tree. The point is this: We do not overcome sin by fighting it. We overcome it by refusing it -- not passively -- but by focusing ourselves upon that which is good. There is a big difference, and the only way we will ever stop fighting and begin refusing is if we see and believe that the victory over sin is already won in Christ. Then we'll stop trying to win the victory and begin standing and resting in HIS victory.

12:10 Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another.

"Preferring," here, means "to lead the way for others." In effect, we are being told to get out of the way and let others "have the floor." We are to call attention, not to ourselves, but to Christ, and we are to consider others as being just as valuable to God as ourselves.

Imagine yourself in heaven, with all of the other Christians who have ever lived. Can you imagine trying to get everyone to honor YOU, or even pay attention to YOU? No one will be looking. They'll all be busy worshipping Christ, and you'll be standing there saying, "Look at me!" And if that is so in heaven, then we should be about the business of practicing it here. May we open our hearts and allow God to free us from the constant preoccupation we have with ourselves!

Food for thought: If we have never been detached from ourselves in this

life; somewhat set free from our self-centered spiritual attitudes, then how will be possibly function in an eternal realm where self-centeredness is foreign?

12:11 Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

Rather than be slothful in business, we are to be fervent in it, serving the Lord. Again, the entire life not only belongs to God, but should be a by-product of the fact that we do. There is no such thing as a religious life and a secular life. There is only THE life we have in Christ.

12:12 Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.

"Patience," in the NT, comes from a word which means "to abide under." God wants us to "abide under" those tribulations which He allows. He does not want us to escape them through our own strength. HE will provide a way of escape if He so chooses, in His time and own way.

Continuing instant in prayer is always necessary, but especially in tribulation. The nature of trials is to get my focus off of God, and onto something less. This rarely happens in a minute. It usually happens as a result of a gradual wearing down; as a result of my allowing discouragement and unbelief to gradually dominate my thinking and conduct. Continual prayer is the best guard against this error.

12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints. Given to hospitality.

In the NT, the most common reason for giving was to supply the needs of the saints. We also find the support of ministry being mentioned, but certainly not as a greater priority. The point is, today the support of ministry is made to be the number one reason to give. The average needy Christian is almost forgotten. Keeping ministries alive should have never become a priority for the Body of Christ. It's God's business to keep them alive. We should give to the saints first, and then to a ministry, if God leads.

12:14 Bless them which persecute you. Bless, and curse not.

If God commands US to bless and curse not against those who would do us evil, then why do we suppose He is sitting in heaven condemning those who do HIM evil? We need to revise our thinking about God! Those who are

finally condemned will not be so because God has cursed them. They will be condemned because they have cursed God. Those who are deemed worthy of eternal separation from God will prove God's judgment upon them is just by insisting, right to the end, that they are right and God is unfair. And don't think such attitudes will be displayed only by those who are sinners. Some Christians are accusing God in that way right now!

12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

This verse describes the quality of mercy in general, and the gift of mercy exercised. But we must understand something here. The only way in which I can rejoice and weep with another, and do it according to the will of God, is if I am at one with God's interests in them. Rejoicing and weeping with someone in a soulish way could very well put me at odds with what God wants in their life. This calls for discernment.

12:16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Being of the "same mind" does not necessitate agreement as to opinion. Neither does it mean we are to "submit" our minds to the mind of a church leader. The question is really, "Whose mind are we all to have?" Clearly, we are to have the mind of Christ. (See Phil. 2:5) Thus, we see the only way to true unity. God's unity is never produced by everyone agreeing to give up their mind in favor of the mind of the leader. It is achieved by each member of the body, independently developing the mind of Christ. If I have Christ's mind, and you have Christ's mind, then we have the same mind -- His mind -- and we are as one. The mind of Christ always has one goal: The will and glory of God.

12:17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

12:18 If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men.

12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

12:20 Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him drink. For in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head.

Some of us use this scripture to "bide our time" over someone we resent. We think, "Good. God's going to get them, if not here, then at the last judgment. I'll just bide my time." But this is not of the love of God, and could never be God's will for us to do. So what is God saying here?

It is true that we are to leave off meting out justice, and simply leave it to God. But there is more we should do. We have to completely forgive others. What this means is that I must be willing to say, "Lord, I don't want a single thing this person ever did to me so much as brought up at the last judgment. I forgive them. I want it let go." Can I say that? Am I willing to have the sins which others have committed against me blotted out, never mentioned again, even by God at the last judgment? If not, ask yourself: "Am I prepared to have God mention MY sins? Not just the ones against Himself, but the ones I've committed against others? Wouldn't I want the kind of forgiveness from others, and especially God, which treats sin as if it never happened?"

Be not mistaken, God is not going to pretend someone is a saint when they are a sinner. He is not "so forgiving" that He is going to simply overlook terrible sin. If a person has sinned against God, and has refused to repent, then God will have to judge them. But we are not God. We have no business increasing someone else's "debt load" before God by demanding that the wrongs they have committed against us take priority in the mind of God. Do I really consider my life to be hallowed ground upon which no person may tread? My forgiveness towards others is to be unconditional and forever. I am to leave them with only their sin against God to answer for, before God Himself, for He has been sinned against by each one of us.

We heap coals of fire upon someone's head when we respond to their evil by lifting them up to God. They may not turn from their evil, but we will give them no excuse for refusing to do so.

12:21 Be not overcome of evil. But overcome evil with good.

This command would be ridiculous unless good COULD overcome evil. In fact, it already has. God simply wants us to begin living like it. I overcome evil with good when I refuse to allow the evil to move me from my stand in the faith and obedience of Christ.

Expanded Commentary on Romans 12:1-2

Paul writes:

I beseech you therefore brethren, because of the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, the act of which is holy and acceptable unto God. This is your reasonable service. (Rom. 12:1)

Romans 12:1 is a picture of a sacrificial altar. This is something with which those people back in Paul's day would have been familiar. Jews had the OT sacrificial system, but even the Gentiles had sacrificial altars in their pagan systems. Paul is using it here as a picture. He is saying, "God wants a voluntary surrender – by faith. You are to be a LIVING sacrifice." There is some irony in this because the whole point of a sacrificial altar is to put the sacrifice to death. So in describing things in this way, Paul is point out that the believer, by faith, is to voluntarily give themselves to God.

The Truth in this passage is the same one revealed by Jesus in Matthew 16:

If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 16:24-25)

"Whosoever will lose his life for My sake will find it." This is the same Truth, the same principle: Paul is saying, "Get on the altar and tell God to do whatever it takes to bring you into the fullness of His purpose – the fullness of His purpose in Christ. Ask God to do whatever it takes to get His glory in your life." Then, as Jesus stated, when God does begin to do what it takes, pick up your cross and go along with Him. It has to be worked out -- but the commitment can be made. We can get on that altar and ask God to do whatever will get His will and glory through Christ in us.

So he writes, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice. If you do that – if you ask God to do what it takes – such an act of faith is holy and acceptable unto God. It is your reasonable service because it is all you would do if you know the Truth." Sometimes we forget that even the work of the Cross is unto LIFE. Note the words of Jesus – "If you lose YOUR life, you will find ME as your life." Thus, if we see the Truth, and are coming to know Christ, we will WANT God to do whatever it takes. We will WANT to be free of ourselves. This is all positive. Seeing the Truth and embracing it always is.

Why is the work of the Cross necessary if we are to be built up in Christ? Because there is an old structure called US standing in the place of Christ. Thus, alongside of a building up in Christ is the tearing down of US. But again – if we see the Truth we will desire this and thank God for it.

The, “tearing down of us” – the work of the Cross – breaks the power of our natural, soul man. This does not mean we no longer have a soul man or a sin nature. But it does mean that the power is broken so that we can see it for what it is and learn to reckon ourselves dead to it – and reckon ourselves alive to God. And if the natural, religious soul man becomes exposed and broken, then it will eventually become clear to us what is of God, and what is of natural man. We will no longer be in danger of trying to walk with God, or exercise the gifts, from out of our soul man and religious flesh.

There is a principle here – and while the explanation of it is a bit mechanical, it is nevertheless the Truth. That principle is that the LIGHT is in the LIFE. To put it another way, it is only as we experience a greater release in the LIFE of Christ – as that which governs us – it is only then that LIGHT increases as well. We can plug this principle into Romans 12 and Matthew 24. If we pick up the Cross that God lays before us – if we by faith get on the altar – there will begin a breaking of the power of the flesh by the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ. And from out of our union with Christ in His death will come a greater realization of Christ as our life. But along with this greater release of life will come light. Why? Because we are talking about a Person – the One who is both our life and our light. Thus, to the degree that experience what it means for Christ to be our life, we will grow to know Him; grow in a realization of Him.

Now, again – this is a principle that governs all, including spiritual gifts. For the Cross will crucify the natural religious tendency to operate the gifts from out of ourselves. Because we experience Christ as our life and increase in the knowledge of Him, He will be free to manifest the gifts through us His very life and Truth. In short, to the degree that we are governed by His life, the gifts that are OF His life will manifest according to that life. They will be used to do exactly what God wants them to do: Glorify Christ and edify others.

You will note that Romans 12 reveals results of getting on the altar as a living sacrifice. Paul not only tells us that getting on the altar by faith is a holy and acceptable choice, but he goes on to say that if we do this we will not, “be conformed to this world – but we will be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Of course. Because we have come into a greater realization of Christ our minds are going to be renewed by that realization. We will stop being conformed to this

world. That would mean that, yes, we will no longer have the actions of the world, but we will stop having the mind of the world. In the NT, the word, "mind," means intent, desire, and motive. Our minds will be renewed – reprogrammed if you will – according to Christ.

We are being conformed to this world when we think as a natural man would think – and primary to that thinking is the motive of owning and possessing yourself. That can take many forms in the outward – but it boils down to owning yourself. There are many professing believers walk according to SELF – even religiously. The primary manifestation of such a walk is self-righteousness.

No, he says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Well, what renews your mind? Again -- an inward realization of Jesus. If this is happening, and you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind, you are going to see and believe the Truth, Then Paul says, "If you see and realize Jesus, your minds will be renewed – and a renewed mind will, "prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God."

We often ask God to reveal His will to us -- as a, "thing." We want Him to speak words to us such as, "Go here, go there, do this, do that." I would never say that God could not, or would not, do that if it pleases Him to do so. But if you read many of these verses you will discover that the way you learn the will of God is by coming into an inward realization of Jesus Christ -- who is the living word of God. God is speaking today in His Son. Learn Christ and the will of God will become clear to you.

How many can see that every part of God's purpose – and His means of achieving it – comes back to the essential of experiencing some dimension of Christ from out of our union with Him? We must be crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20) – lose our lives under the work of the Cross. This will set us free from ourselves. We are then raised with Him – experience a greater release of His life in us. Along with that we more fully realize Him – and our minds are renewed. We are then able, because of seeing Him, to know the will of God; to recognize the Truth. This will mean that any gift of Christ that operates through us will be free to glorify Him in spirit and in Truth.

Expanded Commentary on Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:6-8)

Let's turn to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4 contains an extended passage that contains much Truth about spiritual gifts.

Paul says there:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation (or invitation) wherewith you were called. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the spirit of unity in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

Even before Paul begins to write directly about spiritual gifts in this chapter, you can see that the gifts of the Spirit, if they are being exercised out from God, are going to be the result of these attitudes of faith that Paul is describing. If a person is walking with Christ by faith, and knows Him, the gifts that emerge will manifest the spirit of, and attitude of, Jesus Christ -- "with all lowliness and meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It should not be surprising that the gifts of the Spirit of Christ carry the nature and character of Christ Himself.

Paul then wraps up his introductory remarks by emphasizing this issue of unity:

There is one body and one spirit even as you are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all and in you all. (Eph. 4:4)

So even before writing about any specific spiritual gift, Paul makes it clear as to the character and the purpose of those gifts. This purpose stated here, is the same purpose he will later declare: The purpose of the gifts are to edify believers in Christ, that is, it is to build up Christ IN believers. But this is not accomplished by mere words, manifestations, or by exercising a gift – as a thing to do in itself. No. Any spiritual gift that is of God, and is ministered according to God's will, is going to minister Christ Himself. And where Christ is ministered through the spirit of God we will always find the character of Christ carried – "with all lowliness and meekness, etc." There will be a dismissing of any personal agenda in favor of God's ONE purpose through His ONE and only Son. That lays a foundation for unity.

All the Gifts are of Christ

Now, all of that is an introduction to this chapter. But Paul goes on in verse 7:

But every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Eph. 4:7)

Read that verse again and consider what it is really saying: The gifts are possible through each person only, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ." In other words, all of the spiritual gifts are out from Christ Himself – out from the Christ who dwells in the believer.

The point is that we must never separate the gifts of the spirit from the Person of Jesus Christ. No. They are not separate. The gifts ARE of Christ – they are a manifestation of Him by the spirit of God.

Paul is stating exactly that: Everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. In other words, all that God has to give by His grace is given to us IN CHRIST. All grace and Truth was given in Jesus Christ. (John 1:17) There is nothing that God gives to humanity through any other means or by any other person. That includes the gifts of the spirit and the fruit of the spirit. ALL of the spiritual gifts come out of Christ Himself -- who dwells within the believer as the source of ALL.

This needs to be clarified because I absolutely believe that the vast majority of believers today do separate the gifts of the spirit FROM the Person of Jesus Christ. Most will say, "Yes, Christ saves us, and yes, we have Him in us. We are joined to the Lord and made one with Him in spirit." (I Cor. 6:17) But then they will say that the gifts of the spirit are not gifts that come out from Christ – but rather -- they will say that the gifts come from the Holy Spirit. Thus, people make a separation between the Person of Christ and the holy spirit. Yet God never does that.

What God does reveal is that Christ dwells in us BY THE MEANS of His holy spirit. We are baptized by one spirit into one body -- His body. In other words, we are baptized into Christ Himself – as it states in Romans 6.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also of His resurrection. (Rom. 6:3-5)

Being baptized into Christ is equal to being joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. The believer is in resurrection union with Christ. That is why Paul is able to say, , "But every one of us is given

grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” (Eph. 4:7) Paul is alluding to the Truth that we are one with Christ in spirit, and thus, all that is spiritual, and of God, including spiritual gifts, are of the Person of Christ with whom we are joined, and into whom we are baptized.

If you gather all of this up, and come to understand the meaning of, “Christ in us,” (Col. 1:27) and the meaning of what it means to be, “joined to the Lord,” (I Cor. 6:17) you will not be able to escape the conclusion that within the believer there is ONE indwelling – not two. We are IN CHRIST; Christ is IN US. There is NOT an additional indwelling in the believer by the holy spirit. No. Again – Christ dwells in the believer by the MEANS of the holy spirit.

That may shock some folks, but it is a vital Truth to grasp. Many believers have been taught that Christ comes to dwell in us at salvation, but then we must go on to receive a second blessing, experience, or indwelling, called the, “baptism with the holy spirit.” Thus, many say Christ is in us, but so is the holy spirit. In fact, many believers minimize the reality and impact of Christ in us, and believe that the baptism with the holy spirit is where we REALLY get what God has for us in His purpose. This is not the truth.

Again -- the indwelling of Jesus Christ is by means of the holy spirit. There is no separate, or second experience, whereby the indwelling of the holy spirit is ADDED to Christ. You don't have two indwellings -- you have one. Neither do you have an indwelling of Christ, and then a, “fullness,” made possible only by the addition of the holy spirit. No. Rather, you have, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” by the Spirit of God. Indeed, it is through the ongoing revelation of Christ within believers BY THE SPIRIT; THROUGH THE GIFTS, that God desires that, “We all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the FULLNESS OF CHRIST.”

The goal of God is the fullness of Christ in His people. This is the purpose of the giving of the spirit of God – the purpose of the gifts -- to begin with. Turn to Romans 8. In verse 32 it says:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Acts 8:32)

God has freely given us all things IN HIS SON. Thus, if Christ is in you, there is nothing God has left to give to you. ALL is given IN HIM. In short, God has NOT given us, “things,” in addition to Christ, or even, “things,” because of Christ. No. Rather, God has given us

CHRIST HIMSELF – in Whom is given ALL THINGS.

This is a Truth so clear, and so often stated in the NT – through many different ways – that it is amazing that any of us could misunderstand it. It is a primary Truth.

Therefore, if God has GIVEN all things in His Son, do not all things that are GIVEN include the GIFTS? Aren't the gifts GIVEN? Sure.

When do you receive Christ? You receive Him when you are saved – you are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. (I Cor. 6:17) That is why you are saved. Being joined to the Lord is the only reason you are eternally alive. He is THE LIFE – and at salvation becomes YOUR LIFE. (Col. 3:4)

Now ask: Christ is THE LIFE -- and at salvation, Christ becomes OUR LIFE. Is there anything of God that could be outside of HIS LIFE? No. Except death. That is why all that God has to give is given IN CHRIST – given in Christ who is THE LIFE. Therefore, it is error to suggest that the gifts, or the fruits, or anything of God, could possibly be received through any other Person than Christ, or through any other experience except that of salvation – which is the point at which we are united with Him and He becomes our life.

All Received in Christ at Salvation

There is not anything left over to receive from God if you have received Christ. God has given ALL in Him and in Him alone. I do understand that this clashes with many beliefs of sincere people, many of whom have been influenced by the charismatic movement. For the charismatic movement teaches that, yes, you do receive Christ at salvation, but you do NOT receive all that God has to give in Him. Rather, to get what God really has for you -- the gifts, and the power to serve, and all the rest – you must receive a, "second blessing; second baptism; second experience," in addition to receiving Christ at salvation. They call this second experience, "the baptism with the Holy Spirit."

Note that this teaching immediately creates a separation between the Person of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the spirit. Sure. They are teaching that you do not receive the gifts, or the power of the spirit, when you receive Christ. You have to get that through a second experience – and if you do not receive this, "baptism with the holy spirit," as they define it, then you do NOT have all that God wants to give you. You do NOT have the gifts of the spirit, or the power of the spirit, that you could have. No. Rather, you have, "only Christ." You are limited because you, "merely have Christ within," for salvation.

This, "doctrine of the second blessing," as it used to be called, is not Biblical. It is error which has resulted in more heresy and subsequent error than we can imagine. For once you depart from the Person of Jesus Christ as the source of all, in any way, you are already in error. Then, the crop you are going to harvest from that is going to be all the worse. A Christianity based on psychic experiences is just one example.

Again -- Jesus said, "I am the life." Paul says, "Jesus Christ IS our life." Thus, we have not been given a THING called, "life," but we have been given Christ, the Person who is our life -- we are joined to Him in spirit. What do we think, that despite the fact that Christ is our life -- despite the fact that He IS the life -- that if we have not gone on to receive a second experience in addition to Him, that there are dimensions of life we do not have? Are not spiritual gifts a dimension of eternal LIFE -- an aspect of the spirit of LIFE in Christ Jesus?

We need to come to terms with these issues. We need to ask ourselves, before the Lord, some very clear and sobering questions. If you have received the Person of Jesus Christ, the One who said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," and who said, "I am the life," and who said, "I am the truth" -- and if you have within you the One IN whom Paul says God has freely given us all things -- of whom Paul said, "we are complete in Him" -- if you have received Him then you need to ask yourself this question: Is there any possibility that you could be lacking anything if you are one with Christ in spirit? For if you continue to believe that you need to go on to a second experience then you are saying that you do lack. You do not have in Christ everything God has for you -- and you do need to go on to another experience to receive all.

I understand that there are millions of people today who are absolutely brainwashed by the teaching that there is salvation -- and THEN a second experience. If you try to talk to them about the Truth you can barely make a dent. They just tune you out the moment you begin to question it. They continue to think that those who do not agree with them, "do not have what they have" -- and are therefore second class citizens of the kingdom of God. Some may even accuse you of blaspheming the spirit of God. But you see, these are just some of the results of creating division between Christians with false doctrine.

There are indeed many people who have had an experience when they were, "baptized with the Holy Spirit," subsequent to salvation. They will tell you that they felt like they went to heaven. They will tell you

that they had some kind of ecstatic experience. Some spoke in tongues – or what they say were tongues. I have been present when people have had that. I have seen it with my own eyes. My answer to this is this: Either we are going to believe people's experiences – or their interpretation of their experiences -- or we are going to believe the Bible.

I do not doubt people's sincerity or the fact that to them their experience was real. I do not believe that most people would lie and make up such an experience. I'm not suggesting that at all. In fact, I am saying that their experience WAS real. But it was not a second blessing. It was not a baptism with the holy spirit. Through the power of expectation it may have been completely emotional. It may also have been purely psychic – of the soul realm. That can be quite powerful, real, and moving. Most of all, regardless of the cause or source, the experience was misinterpreted. How many know that most of us, due to false teaching, are able to misinterpret something God does according to that false teaching? Or we have been wrongly taught to expect certain results from God and therefore we will define almost anything that happens according to our expectations?

Even if God would, in His mercy, touch someone when people lay hands on them and pray for the baptism with the spirit – even then it is NOT an additional gift of grace. It is NOT an additional indwelling added on to the Person of Christ. It is not! God has given everything He has to give to the believer in the Person of Jesus Christ. Everything that the believer could possibly experience that is of God has to come out of Christ as the source. That is an absolute, non negotiable, Truth.

You can take that as a warning and as an exhortation because Paul gives those warnings in Colossians 2. He says, "ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are HID in Christ." (Col. 2:3) Again – ALL in Christ. The moment we begin to stray from Christ to something else – even if we think it is of God -- we are in error. It is NOT of God.

Now, people will say, "You know, I have gotten all these gifts from the spirit of God and you know, that's just as good as getting it from Christ." Yes, but you are then minimizing the Person of Christ as your source, which is exactly what has happened. Isn't the charismatic movement more about the Spirit of God than it is about Jesus Christ? It is!

Jesus made it a point to declare that when the spirit of God would come, the spirit would NEVER speak of itself – the spirit would never focus upon the spirit. So, what do you conclude about a movement that is more about the spirit of God than it is about Jesus? Read John

14, 15, and 16. Jesus Christ said that when the Spirit of God would come that everything that spirit was given to do has to do with Jesus Himself -- to magnify Him to people, and edify them in Christ, and to glorify Christ. The spirit of God never magnifies the spirit of God.

Christ in Us by the Spirit

There are not two indwellings and there are not two experiences. No. When we are saved, we are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him. That joining IS the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It IS the point where Christ comes to dwell in us. At that point, in Christ we have ALL that God has to give. Moving forward, the Christian life is not a matter of adding something God has for us TO Christ. No. Rather, it is a matter of God bringing us into an inward realization of the Christ we have received – and as Christ is unfolded to us, so is all that is found in Him brought into our experience. ALL is given IN HIM – and it is only as we grow in Him that we experience ALL.

Note that great distinction: We are not given anything in addition to Christ. But in Christ we are already given ALL – but we must come to experience Him to experience all.

Romans 8 contains a passage that proves this Truth. I am going to quote verse 9 through verse 11 of this chapter. As I do, please note how many synonymous terms Paul uses in this passage to refer to the same indwelling of Christ in us. He is clearly NOT talking about separate indwellings, or separate experiences. Rather, he is talking about the very same reality of Christ in us – using different terms.

Beginning in Romans 8:9:

You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you.

Here you have two phrases: "In the Spirit," and, "the Spirit of God dwell in you." But Paul goes on in the same thought:

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His, and if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin but the spirit is life because of righteousness.

There are two more phrases or terms, "the spirit of Christ," and, "Christ in you." Can we see that we are reading a passage here which proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Christ in us dwells in us via the spirit of God? All of these phrases are talking, not about differing realities, but about exactly the SAME reality of Christ in the believer?

Paul goes on to say:

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin but the spirit is life because of righteousness. Now, if the spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you.

So, you have numerous terms in this one passage, all of which are representative of the reality that Jesus Christ is in us by the Spirit of God.

I think God has this passage here to make sure we understand that there is one indwelling -- that we are joined to the Lord Jesus and made one spirit with Him. This is THE ONE baptism -- with the Holy Spirit. If you are joined to the Lord and made one spirit with Him, you are immersed in Him. You are baptized into Christ and that is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is the only one there is.

Later, in Ephesians 4, Paul says, "There is ONE baptism." So, why do people get baptized in water, and then go on to get baptized in the Holy Spirit, and think it is a necessary second experience that will give them more of what God has for them?. Well, I think we know the answer to that: It is tradition and it is error. For there is ONE baptism and it happens at salvation when we are baptized into Christ. It is then that we are joined to Him, immersed in Him, and have become one spirit with Him – and if that is true, then all that He is becomes possible for us to experience.

Some of those manifestations of, "all that He is," are called spiritual gifts. Yes, they are called, "the gifts of the spirit." But as we have seen, the spirit IS, "the spirit OF Christ." In other words, they are the gifts of the One who dwells in us.

So, when Paul says in Ephesians 4:7, "But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ," he is including spiritual gifts, which he will go on to write about in this chapter shortly.

He Ascended on High

Paul next writes:

When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the inferior parts of the earth? (Eph.

4:8-9)

Now, of course, it is from out of these verses that people have derived the absurd doctrine that states that when Jesus died, He went to hell or Hades, and gathered up all the people trapped there and took them up into heaven. They link this interpretation up with I Peter 3:19-20. But this entire doctrine is nothing but a tradition that was born hundreds of years ago -- and has no Biblical basis whatsoever. Read Acts 2, where, after the resurrection and ascension, Peter says, "David is not ascended unto heaven." If anyone would have gone to heaven, led by Jesus Christ out of Hades, or wherever we say he was, it would have been David. I don't want to discuss that now -- but so many of these things were established by works such as the Schofield Bible and once they were published and taught over and over became accepted as biblical doctrine. But it is simply NOT the Truth. Now, if you want to believe the traditional interpretation, then fine. This is not an essential doctrine. But you may run into other problems when you try to reconcile this error with other truth.

What Paul is really teaching in Ephesians 4 is that Jesus descended down into this earth – not into the LOWER parts of the earth – but according to the Greek, He descended into the most INFERIOR aspects of this earthly realm – in other words, He became a man and tasted DEATH for us all. This was God, "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," (Rom. 8:3) Jesus did not have the sin nature, and He never sinned. But to the natural eye, He looked just like the rest of us – He became a human being; God in the flesh. And He died for us as the Son of God become man.

It was when Jesus died and was raised that He led captivity captive. The entire Adam race was in captivity to the realm of darkness through sin. Jesus became the Last Adam – He bore in His body on the cross the Adam race – and died. A new creation – a new humanity – was raised up from out of the dead in Him – free from all of the OLD. In other words, Christ led, so to speak, the entirety of the Adam race from out of that old creation -- as He passed through death and resurrection -- and when He was ascended, He led all of humanity up to the throne of God. Not that we are there yet, but humanity as a creature, was now given that possibility. When He ascended on high, He carried everything that was in bondage – humanity and all creation – to the throne of God IN HIMSELF.

Note the point Paul is making: Jesus was ascended and seated at the right hand of God. Only then was it possible for Him, by the means of His spirit of God, to give gifts to humanity. Jesus had said to His disciples that unless He ascended He could not come back to them by

the means of the spirit of God. Paul is stating that same fact as having happened. In short, only once Jesus ascended could He come back down and indwell His people – and His presence in His people would make all of the gifts – indeed all that God gave in Him – possible to be manifested and experienced. This, of course, began to happen in Acts 2.

Purpose of the Gifts

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:10-13)

It is clear that only once Christ was seated in the heavenlies as Lord was it possible for all that He did, and all that He was, to be given to believers by the means of the spirit of God within. And in turn this made it possible for the gifts of the spirit of God to emerge.

Many people tend to limit the gifts of the spirit to, “the sign gifts.” Others make the mistake of thinking that the gifts of the spirit are natural gifts simply brought out and used by God. No. Read the entire passage again. The gifts are Christ within being manifested along a particular line. And the purpose of the gifts are exactly in accordance with what Jesus said the spirit would do: Edify believers in Christ. Reveal Christ to us, in us, and through us. Bring members of His body into spiritual maturity.

Paul mentions some of the gifts of the spirit of God. But again, if you read through this entire passage and keep focused on the context, you will see that all of it has to do with the reality of Jesus Christ in the believer -- and what Christ, by the Spirit, will be doing in those believers and in the body. He writes:

And He (Jesus Christ) gave some apostles and some prophets... (Eph. 4:11)

Now, I do not believe that there are more than 12 apostles – really 13 apostles -- that have ever existed. Judas fell away from the original 12 and was replaced by Paul. Some people take issue with that – not realizing that the apostles made an error in choosing Matthias. They had no business doing that before the Spirit was given. Jesus told

them to wait – but they went ahead and did that -- but God did not acknowledge it.

Now, someone is going to say, "Are you saying the Acts 1 is in error?" No, I am saying that the apostles were in error and that Acts 1 accurately records it. Acts is a narrative. It is not doctrinal teaching. It simply states what they did without commentary. There are other places in the Book of Acts where Luke, in his accurate recording under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also tells us things that apostles did that were out of the will of God and in error. But if we know our Bible and the rest of the New Testament, we will be able to discern what those things are. For example, when James stood up and offered his pronouncements about not eating meat sacrificed to idols he was off the track. He had no business doing that. In fact, Jesus never chose James, His own brother, to be an apostle. But here we have James having assumed leadership over them all. That was wrong.

Anyway, that is an aside. I am simply stating that I do not believe that there were more than those twelve apostles. I also believe that while there can be prophetic gifts, there are no official prophets today. One of the reasons I say this is Hebrews 1:1, where it says, "God, who at different times and in different manners, spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in His Son." How many see that there is a change being stated in that verse? God used to speak one way – through prophets -- but now He speaks in Christ. So, again, are we going to believe what the Bible says or not?

I think we also need to understand that, in that time the term, "prophetic utterance," or, "prophesying," didn't mean what it means now. We think that a prophet foretells the future. But back then, it simply meant to preach or proclaim the Truth. That is why, in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says that it is better to prophesy than to speak in tongues. He is talking about proclaiming the Truth under the inspiration of the Spirit of God -- which is no less a spiritual gift than to prophesy would be -- but we need that clarification.

There can be prophecy today. I think there is a whole lot less of it than is claimed. But that aside, but there is no such person or office as a prophet, anymore than there is such a person or office of apostle. All of these tens of thousands of people who call themselves apostles today are self appointed. It is just part of this disease found in the church today of people wanting to be somebody. It is part of this delusion that people have something to offer God. Forget it!

Paul says, "He gave some apostles and prophets and some evangelists

and some pastor-teachers (one word in the Greek).” You have those four. But what I really want to look at are the next couple of verses because they are going to tell us what the purpose is for which God has given this gift of Christ the Person -- out of whom the gifts of Christ, by the holy spirit, emerge. Here is why the gifts are given:

For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:12-13)

As I noted earlier, the gifts are given in Christ for exactly the same purpose that Jesus said the spirit was to be given to begin with. In John 14, 15, and 16, Jesus said the purpose for the spirit of God being given was to glorify, magnify, reveal Him IN and TO people. That being the case, then you can be sure that this is what the gifts of the spirit are supposed to be doing. God does not contradict Himself.

Take note: If the gifts of the spirit are from out from Christ through a person, then it ought to make sense that those gifts would be unto a revelation of Christ TO people, IN people, and THROUGH people. Sure. And it also ought to make sense that the purpose will never be to make the gift the focal point, or the spirit by which the gift manifests the focal point. No. The sole purpose of the gifts is to bring people into a realization of Jesus Christ so that we might know Him and walk with Him in God’s eternal purpose.

We see this purpose in that word EDIFY. What does that mean -- to edify people; to edify the Body of Christ? Well, that word, “edify,” in the New Testament Greek means, “to build up.” God wants to build His people out of the spiritual life of Christ. Or, if you prefer, God wants to build Christ up in His people. Paul alluded to this in Galatians 4:19:

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.

The word translated, “formed,” means, “to be inwardly realized and expressed.” This is what God wants to do. He wants to bring us into an inward knowing and experiencing and realization of Jesus Christ. Well, that is just a different way of saying that He wants to build up Christ within us or build us up in Christ, if you prefer. This is the purpose of God and the purpose for which, He has given gifts. It is the purpose for which you are called. If you come into the inward realization of Jesus Christ this can be the core and the foundation

upon which God does all else in and through you as a believer.

Now, if you look at this, what you will also see is that without the realization of Christ within, without, at least, being in the process of knowing Him, the gifts that will be functioning cannot be functioning according to the truth. How can you be used of God to manifest a spiritual gift according to Truth if you are in error? How can you preach Truth if you do not know Truth, or if you believe error? You can't. Indeed, if the source of the gifts is Christ Himself through the spirit of Truth then if you don't know the Truth and if you are not teaching the Truth then what you are doing cannot be of God. At best, it will be from out of your natural man.

Now, this is an interesting area – because we need to make a distinction between natural gifts and spiritual gifts. Sometimes that distinction is hard to wrap your mind around. But it is really a matter of the SOURCE of the gift. The source of the spiritual gifts is Christ. The source of a natural, religious gift, is myself.

This is a call for discernment. A natural gift, or a psychic gift, or even something of the enemy, may look like a spiritual gift. That which is of the psychic realm can often counterfeit a spiritual gift of God. There can be psychic phenomena and people can feel things. They will tell you that they were shivery all over, or that they felt tingly all over, or that they felt some tremendous thing come over them. All of that can be psychic. There are people who don't even claim to believe in God who have those experiences. I have video tapes of them. The psychic realm is an enormously powerful realm – it is quite real. God created it. But when Adam fell, it was all forfeited into the realm of darkness.

So, spiritual gifts are out from Christ by his Spirit. Natural gifts are, at best, out from natural man. As we remember, Jesus said that what is born of the Spirit is spirit and what is born of the flesh is flesh. There is a very distinct line there – and it applies to the spiritual gifts. Just as the spiritual gifts will edify and build up people in Christ -- and bring people into a greater realization of Him -- natural gifts will tend to build people up in themselves; will create a Christianity of the soul; will make self the center. It may take quite some time for the true nature of things to manifest because a soulish Christianity is a counterfeit Christianity. But if we grow to know Christ we will see the Truth.

Now, let me give an example of that: I have seen churches where not a single person among them was saved -- but they were practicing some form of Christian religion; going to church every week; doing all the stuff that churches do. Let's just say that we have a group of

people like that. They have their list of traditions and doctrines and do things they have adhered to for decades. But if their pastor is just as deceived as they are, how can he help them? All he can do is affirm the error by continuing to preach it. And if you would try to get up and preach the Truth to them they would think it to be error. Indeed, every week, some Jehovah's Witness preacher stands up and edifies his congregation in the heresy of that cult. They all think this is a spiritual gift operating through him. But it is not. It is the spirit of error. There are situations like that in what are considered to be fundamental Protestant churches, charismatic churches, and mainline denominations. Such congregations are built, not upon Christ, but are a house of cards.

You can also have situations, as seen on TV, when those prosperity teachers get up and teach. The crowds are jumping up and down with hands raised, praising God to high heaven, with tears running down their cheeks. I am not doubting the sincerity of those poor people. But, all of it, the preaching, the understanding, even the feelings and the emotions, are very much in error. None of it has anything to do with Jesus Christ. And yet those involved think it is of God. They think that the spirit of God is doing all of it, when in fact, it is the spirit of error. What is the problem here? Folks do not know Jesus Christ.

I heard one TV preacher the other day say, "God told me that everywhere our TV signal is sent there is an anointing in it and He is going to bless whoever sees or hear it." He said God told him that. My answer to that is, "No, He did not." There is no such thing as an anointing imbedded in a TV or radio signal. Rather, John the apostle says that, "the anointing abides in you." (I John 2:26-27)

Furthermore, God does not guarantee to unconditionally bless – even if a person taught Truth but now teaches error. I know of another very famous preacher who drove into a city where he wanted to start a church, and he claimed that God told him that everything his hand touches, God would bless. God doesn't say stuff like that. What if we get off the track? Is God going to bless that? Why would we want Him to? We ought to hope He would remove blessing and correct us! But see, when we are full of ourselves, and we think that we are THE guy, or we are THE woman, we come up with that garbage because it satisfies something in our religious pride.

So, you can have substitutes for any one of the gifts of God. You can have effects and manifestations. So let's ask: What is the real distinction? The real distinction is Christ. Spiritual gifts are from out of Christ. Natural gifts are from out of us. Spiritual gifts will build up in Christ. Natural gifts, no matter how religious, will build up

natural, religious man. And what is the safeguard – the safeguard against being deceived into operating out from natural man, according to our own self-life? The work of the Cross. More on that in a moment.

Some Conclusions

Back to Ephesians 4:12. Here is why the gifts are given:

***For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry --
which is for the edifying of the Body of Christ.***

How many remember that Jesus said, "I will build My church?" (Matthew 16:18) We saw earlier that the word EDIFY means TO BUILD UP. So there it is again. Jesus is going to build His church upon Himself -- upon The Rock.

If you read that Matthew 16 account, you will see that when Jesus said, "I will build My church" that He was talking about the people – the ekklesia – that constitute the church. The people would be built. And in context He clearly stated that the, "materials," out of which those people would be built was an inward revelation of Himself – which the disciples had just received. Upon that rock – that inward realization of Myself -- I am going to build up My people who constitute the church -- and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it." Same truth that Paul writes: For the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

What is all of this leading to? Gather it all up. What is the goal? The unity of the faith and the knowing of Jesus Christ. Of course, the word, 'knowledge,' in the New Testament Greek, is far beyond the idea of brain power. It means to experience or realize. So, this is what God is doing: In this age, He desires that His gifts operate from out of the measure of Christ found in each one. But ultimately, He wants us all to discover and experience the FULLNESS of Jesus Christ. This is to begin here in this age. But it is during the eternal ages that believers will be able to experience His fullness, free of the natural.

The body of Christ is intended by God to be living extensions of Christ. That is the picture of a body, isn't it? But again, it only begins here. God is building that now – building people up in Christ - - preparing a foundation. The fullness of God's purpose in Christ will not be realized until we enter into the eternal ages. God wants a group of people called the Body of Christ that Christ can live in and through in the eternal ages -- through whom He can minister to other

people.

His Gifts through His Life

Paul says:

Now I say, by the grace given unto me, to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has granted to every man a measure of faith. For, as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one Body in Christ and members one of another. Having then gifts that vary (or differ) according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy (preaching), let us prophesy according to the portion of faith. (Rom. 12:3-6)

These words are very similar to those of Ephesians 4. "by the grace given unto me...according as God has granted to every man a measure of faith." But note how Paul brings in the church as the BODY of Christ. This picture of the church – of the ones through whom the gifts operate – is significant. For if the gifts are operating through the BODY of Christ – through those who are member of Christ; one with Christ – if the BODY of Christ is operating as extensions of Christ – does this not prove that the gifts of the spirit are OF Christ Himself? The gifts of the spirit are manifestations of Christ Himself operating through those who are members of Him. It is that simple

To wrap up the passage from Ephesians 4, we are being told that God Almighty has freely given to us the Person of His Son. And in His Son God has freely given all that He has to give. God has never given, nor will He ever give, anything which is outside of the Person of Jesus Christ. Thus, since all that God has given is given in Christ, the only way to experience what God has given in Christ is to experience Christ Himself.

Included in all that God has given in Christ are the manifestations of Christ that we call spiritual gifts. All of those spiritual gifts are dimensions of Christ by His Spirit. And because they are manifestations of Christ, they will edify those who hear and open themselves to the Truth – they will edify them in that very same Jesus. These gifts are for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. That work of ministry is the edifying and building up of the Body of Christ until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. God wants people, not only individuals but a collective Body that will manifest His Son and be extensions of Christ in ministry. This begins here, in this age. But it is all unto

God's eternal purposes through Christ for the age yet to come.

Romans
Chapter 13
Love is the Fulfilling of the Law

A Christian's relationship to civil authority and government is the issue of this chapter. Paul tells us that we are to obey the powers that be, but not because we owe it to them. No. We are not of this world. We obey the powers that be because love dictates that we do so. And all that we do is to be governed by love.

13: 1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God.

Verses 13:1-10 must be taken as a whole if we are to grasp the teaching God is giving us here. He tells us that as obedient Christians we are to subject ourselves to the governmental authorities which are over us. He says that the powers that be are ordained of God. But wait. Didn't the apostles refuse to obey the government when they were commanded to stop preaching the gospel? Sure. So have thousands of other martyrs. They said, "We must obey God rather than men." (see Acts 5:29) Clearly, the teaching here in Romans does not cover all the possibilities. It is actually possible to resist government -- which God says are in power by His ordinance -- and be OBEYING God. This leads us to an important conclusion: The powers that be are ordained of God. But what those "power that be" do and command are NOT always ordained of God.

There can be no argument with this. If God ordained the authorities which commanded the apostles to stop preaching, and the apostles refused to obey that command, saying that they had to obey God instead, then clearly, God was not behind the command to stop preaching. He would not tell the apostles to preach through His Son, and then tell them to stop preaching through the government. He does not contradict Himself. So yes, those who gave the command were in power by God's permission, but the command they gave and the things they did were not reflective of God's will.

It is important that we understand the balance to this Truth. Just because God has allowed a person to have governmental authority it does not mean that everything the person does is ordained of God. Indeed, God may have allowed that person to have authority for the expressed purpose of giving His people the opportunity to obey God rather than man. The person may have no other function in the plan of God than to be the instrument whereby His

people might learn to disobey authority in favor of obedience to God. If we believe the words of Paul, this must be true. God allowed people to be in power who opposed the Truth. This wasn't because God approved of them, nor did God cause them to oppose the Truth. It was because He wanted to build character in His early church.

Some today have missed this Truth completely. They focus on the "submission to authority," and minimize submission to God. The teaching of this passage is clearly that, yes, we are to submit to all authority. But we are to submit to authority ONLY as it constitutes submission to God. When it doesn't, then we are to disobey authority, no matter what. This is not a license to look for opportunities to resist authority. It is FREEDOM to obey God in spite of those around us.

This passage reminds us of Paul's teaching about Pharaoh. God raised up Pharaoh for the purpose of glorifying Himself. In other words, yes, God ordained, or allowed, Pharaoh to have authority. But that doesn't mean that God ordained everything Pharaoh did, much less approved of it. No. God allowed a monster to have power over His people so that He could do a work in His people. Israel ended up rebelling against Pharaoh, in that they refused to remain under his control. They eventually obeyed God rather than man.

We must never forget that this world is in the power of Satan. We must likewise not forget that man's government was never invented by God. Man's rule over man is a reality within which God has consented to work, simply because He is merciful and all-loving. But in the final analysis, it was never God's perfect will, and will eventually have to be dismantled.

One other point: This passage says nothing about church authority. It is dealing only with the governmental authorities. And what applies to the former does not necessarily apply to the latter. There have always been those who have fancied themselves as spiritual authorities over God's people, yet who have never been called of God to such a capacity. Many use this passage as proof of their authority. But just because someone holds a spiritual office, it does not mean they have spiritual authority. Just because they are ordained by man, it does not mean they are ordained of God.

Spiritual authority is never an office held, or a position filled. It is the character of Jesus Christ, that of a bond-slave, pushing out through a person to the edification of others.

13: 2 Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God. And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Cults are built upon the premise that if you resist the authority which rules the cult, you are resisting God. But we cannot apply this scripture to spiritual leadership. Why? Because Jesus said, "You know the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you." (see Matt. 20:25-26) Christ's kingdom is NOT of this world. We cannot apply the principles of man's government to God's government. The two are opposed to each other.

Paul speaks here strictly of man's government, and considers only those instances where obedience to government does constitute obedience to God. That is the context we must remember.

"Damnation," here, means "to judge against." God is telling us -- not, that we will be condemned to hell if we dare resist authority -- but that if we refuse to obey the civil law we are going to be judged by that law. We will not be spared the consequences of our actions if we continue to resist the government out of an attitude of rebellion.

13: 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power. Do that which is good and you shall have praise of the same.

13: 4 For he is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid. For he bears not the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God; an avenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil.

God knows that without government, there would be chaos. So, despite the fact that man's government is not His perfect will, God allows it for the protection of His people. Imagine if there were no government at all! Anarchy would be the rule.

Again we see the mercy of God. He says to man, "You have refused my rule. But since I intend to redeem you, in the meantime I'll work within the corrupt system you have created. I'll allow it to be a little form of civil order and protection.

13: 5 Wherefore you must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

13: 6 For, for this cause pay you tribute also, for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

There are two reasons why a Christian must obey the laws of man -- when such obedience constitutes the love of God: First, because if we don't obey we are going to pay the penalty for breaking those laws. But secondly, and more importantly, we are to obey them because it is right to obey them in the eyes of God. A Christian who is submitted to God will never look for an opportunity to break the law of man. He will look for the opportunity to obey the law of man.

13: 7 Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

13: 8 Owe no man anything, but to love one another. For he that loves another has fulfilled the law.

Notice the clear teaching in these two verses: We are to render all that man's law dictates, but NOT because we are indebted to do so by the law of man. No. We are to have the attitude that we "owe no man anything." But having that attitude, rather than freeing us to refuse payment, actually frees us to make payment, all in the name of the love of God. Our "debt," if you will, is to LOVE one another.

This Truth is so vital to understand. It governs so much in our living that it cannot be under-emphasized. God is telling us that we are totally FREE from having to obey the laws of man. NO ONE has authority over us. But rather than provide a license for rebellion, this Truth actually makes us want to obey all the more. Why? Because the love of God motivates us. In the final analysis, I am to obey authority -- any authority, whether it be government, church, or job -- when obedience to that authority fulfills the love of God. But when disobedience fulfills love, then I am to disobey. This is true Christian freedom.

We can see that this issue pivots NOT upon what I do, but upon the condition of my heart. Most things in Christ do. And it is sometimes quite difficult for us to see the difference. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to show it to us.

13: 9 For this, "Thou shall not commit adultery; Thou shall not kill; Thou shall not steal; Thou shall not bear false witness; Thou shall not covet," and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, "Thou shall love thy neighbor

as thyself."

13:10 Love works no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Again, the context of this passage is obedience to civil government. Paul says that LOVE governs our conduct, not the civil law. This explains why the apostles were able to disobey civil commands. The love of God told them to.

This principle of love can be applied to ALL of our living. We are to walk fulfilling the love of God. If that means we must obey authority, then we obey it. If that means we must disobey it, then we disobey it. Love dictates, not rules and regulations.

It takes a change of heart through the new birth to be able to stop walking according to law -- any law -- and to begin being motivated by the love of God. But that is the only way in which a Christian can actually fulfill the holy law of God.

13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

This verse has been interpreted to mean that Paul thought the return of Christ was near. Ok. But notice the last part of the verse, and how it proves that full salvation is NOT ours to experience in this life. We do possess it fully, and can't get any more saved than we are. But the full release and experience of it is impossible as long as we are encumbered by this broken creation.

13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13:13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness; not in chambering and wantonness; not in strife and envying.

13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

"Cast off," and "put on" are choices we must make in our conduct, both in the inward and outward realms. We have power to make those choices through the victory of Christ, as shown in Romans 6-8. Verse 13:14

describes what has been termed "premeditated obedience." I can decide, ahead of time, what I will allow into my life. I can "make provision" for sin, even if I am not presently acting out the sin, or I can "cut off" all provision so that it won't be there to tempt me. Which I do will depend on the condition of my heart. Do I value Christ enough to burn all bridges that conflict with His holiness?

Expanded Commentary on Romans 13:8-10

Agape

When all of the religious bantering is over, and all of the dust clears, each person's relationship with God comes down to one thing: Love. AGAPE is the Greek for the love of God. Yet it seems as if so few of us even understand the term. What is "agape?"

AGAPE is the term used to describe God Himself. John writes, "God IS love." So whatever "agape" means -- that is what God is -- as to His fundamental nature and character. Thus, we see the importance of knowing what this word means.

AGAPE is sometimes translated "charity." It speaks of a self-sacrificial giving of one's self to another -- for their betterment. Actually, if we want to know what God means by the word, all we have to do is read I Cor. 13:

Charity suffers long, and is kind; charity envies not; charity vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Bears all things, believeth all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Cor. 13:4-7)

This is not only a description of AGAPE, but it is a description of the character of God Himself. It describes what is in the heart of God towards us.

A Definition of Agape

In this day and age of moral compromise, we have redefined almost everything to fit our refusal to be accountable to God, and to each other. Today, love is usually defined as allowing everyone to do as they please, and doing our best to stay out of their way. Those who define love in this way usually do so because THEY want to do as THEY please, and want God to stay out of THEIR way.

God's love is nothing of the sort. Indeed, if God IS love, then whatever AGAPE is must include and maintain everything else God IS: Holy, just, and good. And indeed AGAPE does do that completely.

So how might we define AGAPE -- the love of God? Here is a good suggestion:

AGAPE IS BEING UNCONDITIONALLY COMMITTED TO GOD'S HIGHEST FOR THE PERSON LOVED, REGARDLESS OF PERSONAL COST TO ME OR TO THEM.

If you will notice, this definition puts God, and His will, in the center for each person. Love is not "giving someone their will." Love is "being committed to God's will" – both for myself and for everyone else. In effect, AGAPE stands for God – and His plan and purpose -- for each person. And AGAPE is willing to do "whatever it takes" to see God's will come to pass.

Of course, "whatever it takes" will always be within God's character, plan, and purpose – as revealed in scripture. Or to put it more simply, "whatever it takes" will also be within LOVE. God's highest is never achieved by compromising with the highest. It is achieved by standing for the Truth at all cost.

That definition of God's love is good because it is exactly the way God loves us. God is unconditionally committed to His highest for each of us. He will never compromise with this in any way. He has already paid HIS personal cost to see to it that His highest is possible for us, and will ask us to pay the same price as well.

Practically speaking, this means that God will sacrifice whatever is necessary in your life to bring through His purpose. And frankly, we should want Him to. Do we want to forfeit what God has for us, in favor of a temporal satisfaction of some sort?

God's love is so constant and eternal that those who hate Him are going to end up eternally separated from Him. Why? Because God won't stop loving them, and they won't stop refusing Him. So in the end, the love of God -- which ought to draw them -- ends up hardening them. It isn't the love that's the problem. It's them. If God's love is unconditionally commitment to God's highest in a person, then if that person refuses God's highest, they are refusing God's love.

Love One Another

Now, if you will notice, the way God loves us – as defined above – is the way we are supposed to love each other. In effect, real love will NEVER compromise with the Truth. Real love will NOT say right is wrong, or that wrong is right. Real love will NEVER help you destroy yourself – all in the name of being nice, being "tolerant," or under the guise of "religious freedom." Real love will stand for God and His Truth and refuse to be moved. Real love will not take such a stand out of personal pride or agenda. It will take this stand for the sake of Christ in the other person – even if that other person hates you for it.

When Jesus said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you," He wasn't kidding. He meant exactly what He said. And since God isn't in the habit of giving commands for the fun of it, we ought to take heed. We need to love in this way.

But how? Well, first of all, you and I are wasting our time trying to love each other if we have not seen that God loves US. Consider love to be a river which

flows from God, downward to us, and then, out through us to others. This really is how it works. The SOURCE of all love is God. Thus, it is only as I receive God's love for myself that God can love others through me.

So how to you come to possess the love of God? By allowing Love Himself to possess you. As you grow in your surrender to Christ, you grow in your experience of His love for you. And you are then able to love others with that same love.

Not Just a Feeling

Now, when we talk of love, we are apt to think of it as a "fuzzy feeling." Or make the mistake of thinking that God requires that we LIKE everyone – and never have any bad reactions towards the personality of others, or towards what they do. This is NOT what AGAPE is all about – although good feeling towards something can be included in real love.

Read again the definition of AGAPE. In the final analysis, AGAPE is an UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT. It is a RELATIONSHIP word. It is a choice of commitment to God first, and then, because I am committed to God, I am committed to everyone else on the behalf of God. Fuzzy feelings, sentimentality, and emotions, are rather detached from all of this. It is quite possible to love something fully within the love of God, but to be hopping mad at what they are doing – because we know that they are hurting themselves or others.

God loves in that way. Read the Bible. On the one hand, God says He loves us all. On the other, we have Him being angry, and pouring out His wrath. How can both be true? The same way both can be true for any concerned parent. You love your children, but punish and chastise them – because you love them.

Love is unconditional commitment for God's highest for the one loved. Not MY highest. Not THEIR highest. Not anyone else's highest. But GOD'S highest. Of course. Love believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things – unto God's highest for the one loved. What greater commitment could there be?

So when you think of love, don't think of personality. Some folks have a more loving personality than others. Some folks come across as loving, and others as a bit formal. But none of this has anything to do with their commitment – or lack thereof – of love. Is a person absolutely devoted to Jesus Christ – in a way that translates into commitment to those around them on HIS behalf? That is love. Not merely the human, emotional stuff we call "love."

This IS Love

John the apostle, who talks the most about AGAPE, puts love in practical terms. He says,

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:2-3)

Note what John is really saying. He is saying that if I love someone, I am going to want to keep God's commandments towards them – but not out of mere duty. It won't be a grievous burden for me to do so. I will want to do so because I love them!

Anyone of us is capable of keeping rules for the wrong reasons. Lots of Christians keep commands and rules because they think they are going to earn a bigger reward if they do. Others keep rules because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't. Others keep rules and commandments because it pays them to in the way of admiration, pride, furthering an agenda, and making friends. But AGAPE keeps the commandments because a person is absolutely devoted to Jesus Christ – and is committed to His highest in everyone else.

Obedience is always the outcome of being rightly related to God – which speaks of love. But if I am rightly related to God, it is going to result in becoming ever increasingly rightly related to others. You will notice that the first four commandments rightly relate us to God. The last six rightly relate us to each other. In effect, LOVE is not practiced in a vacuum. It is about RELATIONSHIPS.

How do I become rightly related to God? I come to Him through Jesus Christ. And if I do, and it is real, I will grow to experience God's love for me. I can then grow to love others because of Him.

How Does God Love?

If we want to know how to love, we need only find out how God loves, for He IS love. He is our example. We are, in fact, told that we need to love the way in which God loves. Jesus said:

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. (Matt. 10:24-25)

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

This tells us that if God does not love all people, then we don't need to love all people. If Christ did not die for all, but for only a select few, then we would likewise be free to refuse to forgive those that God will not forgive. Is a disciple above his master? Will we forgive those whom Christ refused to die for?

Five point Calvinism teaches that Jesus did not die for all. God never intended Him to die for all. God never intended to forgive those who are not elected. But if that is true, then I am not required to forgive them either. Nope. Am I to forgive those who God choose not to forgive? Jesus says I am to love as He loves. Case closed.

Of course you see what I'm getting at. Jesus DID die for all. He had to die for all if He died for one. That's because God IS love, and by definition, He cannot be a respecter of persons if He is love.

Someone who believed in five point Calvinism once suggested that God is under no obligation to save anyone, and so He is free to simply save a few. That's fine if we are talking only about legal justice. But we are not. We are talking about LOVE. The Bible says that what God did in the Redemption is THE fundamental expression of His love. Not just one of them. But THE one. When we understand that God is motivated by love, obligation has NOTHING to do with it any longer.

Love is not motivated merely by obligation. It is not limited by it. In fact, do you know what the Bible says about love and obligation? It says that love unconditionally obligates us!

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another hath fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

If I love someone, I voluntarily obligate, or indebt ,myself to them – unto God's highest. I do this voluntarily. This is not merely a facet of love. It IS love. I commit myself to them for God's highest -- not because I must – but because I want to.

Because God is love, He has voluntarily given Himself to us through Jesus Christ. And because God IS love, there is no way for Him to give Himself only to some. By definition, this would mean that God loves some, but not others. Impossible. God may not have been under legal obligation to give Himself to anyone, but He has given Himself to all. He has voluntarily put Himself under the obligation or debt. Love can do nothing less.

If you discovered that I had two boys who were sick, and I gave medicine to one, but refused to give it to the other, you would be outraged. And you ought to be. Why? Because you would recognize the moral sin I was committing in first, not helping when it was within my power to do so, but secondly, in helping one, but not the other child.

What if my answer to this was that I was under no obligation to help either child, so the one I did help was really a matter of me going beyond my obligation – of going the extra mile? You would know I was wrong in this. There is something about being able to help, but refusing to help, that is WRONG. It is a moral wrong for human beings. How much more for God.

The Love

God is for us. Totally FOR us. But once we understand what this means, we see that God cannot and will not help us destroy ourselves. Agape is being committed to GOD'S highest for the person loved – regardless of cost. Thus, we must allow God to love us on HIS terms, not ours. He simply cannot do it any other way.

God has done everything possible to both declare His love for us, and make it possible for us to come back and experience His love. He has given HIMSELF to us. He laid down His life for us, and bore the sin of the world. Once we enter into this reality, we will begin to experience the love of God.

Scripture tells us HOW God has most profoundly manifested His love:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

But God demonstrates his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:11)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

Now, it is precisely because these verses are so familiar to us that we sometimes lose their impact. The message here is that LOVE is self-sacrificial. LOVE will do anything necessary to save the one loved – even unto self-sacrifice. God, who IS love, did exactly that. HE not only gave us salvation. He gave us HIMSELF.

Get that. Jesus died for us. We have life through Him. But in the final analysis, Jesus left heaven and became one of us, and gave Himself for us. Indeed, Paul says this very thing in his letter to the Galatians:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

This is, of course, the gospel. But have we ever noticed that the FACT that God gave Himself to us through Christ is said to be the ultimate expression of His love? In short, to give oneself for another is the greatest expression of love anyone can have for another.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

Human love is a give and take. If you love me, I'll love you. If you are nice to me, I'll be nice to you. If you do right to me, I'll do right towards you. But with the love of God, it is not so. God loves us, even if we don't love Him. God blesses us, even if we don't bless Him. Consequently, if we want to love one another with the love of God, how must it work? Well, it will mean that when you don't love me, I will continue to love you. When you are bad to me, I will be good to you. When you are mean to me, I will do right by you.

Can we see what is going on here? Love – the agape love of God – is never dependent on the one loved. It is dependent on the one loving. The one giving the love continues to LOVE to the complete disregard of the one receiving it. In other words, AGAPE is UNCONDITIONAL and ETERNAL.

This is the "kind" of love expressed in the Redemption – that God loves us even while we are yet His enemies and sinners against Him. God IS love towards us – even when we are at enmity against Him.

Romans

Chapter 14

Walking in Love

If love is to govern our relationships with those of the world, then it should do so all the more with those of the household of God. This chapter deals with how Christians should deal with differences of opinion and doctrine. Again, love is to motivate us in all that we do.

14: 1 Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

"Doubtful disputations" means, in Greek, "opinionated arguments." The point is, we are not called to try to win people over to our point of view. If we happen to believe one thing, and a brother happens to believe another, we are not to embrace him with the hidden agenda of trying to win him over to our opinion. Our goal must be to get him into business with Jesus Christ for himself, and to make ourselves as useless as possible as quickly as possible.

"Weak in the faith" describes one who isn't sure what he believes, or one who has incorrect ideas about the Truth. So he looks to others for answers. But even if I find that my brother has some completely wrong ideas about Jesus Christ I am never to approach him with the attitude of a superior person, or with the attitude of condemnation. I am to receive him as one Christ has died for, and consider myself a possible vessel through whom God might work. There should be nothing of personal pride in it on my behalf.

14: 2 For one believes that he may eat all things. Another, who is weak, eats herbs.

14: 3 Let not him that eats despise him that eats not. And let him which eats not judge him that eats, for God has received him.

14: 4 Who art thou that judges another man's servant? To his own Master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand.

Despite the clarity of these verses, many in Christianity continue to disobey them. To "despise" someone for what they believe means to "take them lightly," or to put it another way, it means to think of myself as better than them because they don't believe what I believe. It is the height of spiritual pride to think that what I believe makes me great. Even if what I believe is the Truth of God, my faith doesn't MAKE me great. My faith simply believes God is great.

Imagine thinking you are great because you believe the sun will rise tomorrow morning. You aren't great for believing that truth. You are simply embracing the facts. Believing true things never makes anyone great. There is simply no other sane thing we can do.

God "has received" the one who believes wrong things. Why? Because he has done it through ignorance. He is "weak in the faith." This is quite a different condition than being "hard of heart." "Hardness of heart" is a condition of unbelief -- a refusal to receive Truth because of what it might cost me. Those "hard of heart" may not consciously know the Truth they refuse. But they COULD know it. They refuse to allow God to deal with the spiritual pride, or even sin, which blinds their eyes and plugs their ears. They are fully accountable for this refusal. The ignorant, however, have an open heart; a willingness to receive the Truth. But because of their present stage of growth, they don't see the Truth. They have no point of reference for it. It takes wisdom, and the love of God, to know the difference between those who are hard of heart, and those who are weak in the faith. But the Holy Spirit always knows. The admonition God gives here always applies to both. I am not to try to win people over to my point of view. I am to point them to Christ; to get HIS point of view.

Actually, if I have an attitude of trying to win people over to my point of view, I am in spiritual trouble myself. I am certainly not living with the interests of Christ as my goal, but may be governed by spiritual pride. This is a dangerous condition and one from which Christ wants to deliver us.

God is willing to make one who is weak in faith stand because the issue is NOT what he believes, but the FACT he believes. We all believe many doctrines and teachings which are either flawed or flat-out wrong. But the real question is: Is our real faith in Jesus Christ? Truth sets free, and error always binds, but if a person's faith is in Christ, God has something He can work within that individual.

There are many of us who think that if we "believe all the right doctrines," that surely we must be right with God. This is deception. Doctrine is important, in that it articulates Truth. But it is not Truth Himself. Believing

doctrine about Christ is not the same thing as believing and resting in Christ. This I can do despite much confusion in doctrine. Indeed, I must do it if I am to grow out of my confusion.

14: 5 One man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

14: 6 He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord, and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. He that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks. and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks.

Note the phrase, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his OWN mind." I am not obligated to be persuaded by YOUR mind, nor you by MY mind. I am to be fully persuaded in my OWN mind that what I believe is of God. Obviously, if I am fully persuaded, it is no proof that what I believe is the Truth. But I am not, at that point, accountable for what I don't realize.

God does not require that we live by what we don't know. But He does want us to live up to the highest we DO know. Even if I believe error, it is a sign that my heart is right if I walk according to what I believe. This applies, of course, to those who are "weak in the faith," and not to those who are hard of heart. Those who are hard of heart are already guilty of refusing to walk according to what they do, or could, believe.

This passage should be comforting to those of us who feel insecure because we aren't sure whether everything we believe is the Truth. God WILL bring us into all Truth. But while He does, He does not condemn us for what we can't know. He says, "Live to the highest you believe. Some of it may not be perfect, but if your heart towards Me is right, then that is what I'm after. And it provides Me with what I need to bring you into the Truth you desire."

Our faith is never to be in our ability to believe. Our faith is to be in Christ. Neither is our faith ever to be in our doctrines. It is to be in the Truth Himself.

We need to understand what it means to put our faith in Christ -- and not in our beliefs about Him. We must learn to say, "Lord, I'm not presently sure whether I believe the right thing about You, but I am going to bypass my insecurity and put my faith in YOU, no matter what you are like." In short, we don't need to understand God to believe and trust Him. It is sufficient that He understands us.

14: 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself.

14: 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

14: 9 For to this end Christ both died and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.

The implication here is that because Christ died and rose, His sacrifice covers even those things we do in ignorance. If I am walking in darkness regarding certain spiritual principles, as one dead, but am doing it in ignorance, I stand right before God if I am believing and resting in Christ. His Blood covers for my ignorance. It is good to know that my position in Christ does not depend upon me. It depends upon HIM.

14:10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nought your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul asks, "Why do you pass sentence upon your brother, or consider him to be of little worth, just because his beliefs do not jive with yours?" The ironic thing about a person who thinks himself superior because of his religious beliefs, is that his attitude of spiritual pride actually makes him worse than the one he despises; who simply errs out of ignorance. Anytime I operate from the attitude that I am better than someone else, I am partaking of the worst sin of all. I am trying to make a god out of myself, which is the sin of Lucifer.

God knows that anyone who has really come to see the Truth of Jesus Christ, and what God has done through Him, is going to have spiritual pride progressively crucified out of him. That one will never look down on others as being less than himself, for he will be more than conscious of his own need, and his own wretchedness without Christ. Godly conduct in these matters, both inward and outward, always come back a person's own relationship with God. If I have truly seen my need for Christ, and have tasted of His grace, it will show in how I view others who may be more immature than myself. I'll have the interests of Christ in mind for them. But if I have yet to see the Truth about my need, I'll have my own interests as the goal, even if that interest goes no farther than using their weakness as a springboard to exalt myself.

14:11 For it is written, "As I live," says the Lord, "Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Verse 14:12 accents the fact that we aren't going to bow before each other. All will bow before the ONE Master. We need to reflect that NOW in our attitudes. We are EACH going to give account of OURSELVES to God. We aren't going to be able to point to each other -- either for help, or for an excuse.

Imagine how this will work. When I stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, God isn't going to so much as mention other people. I'll have no one to blame, and no one to credit. He'll simply ask ME what I'VE become through all of my choice and relationships. Hopefully, I'll be able to say to Him, "Lord, I have nothing of myself. I rest only in your Son."

14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

It is important that we grasp what Paul means here by "judge." The context proves that we are not to judge others as less than ourselves simply because they don't believe what we believe. We are not to condemn them, nor are we to esteem them as "less" than ourselves. Again, if we are blessed with the Truth, and they are not, it is not to our credit. It is to the credit of the One who is the Truth, for He has freely given us everything we possess.

In the last half of this verse Paul switches his emphasis. He has just told us we are not to judge others. Now he is going to add another important admonishment: We must likewise not hurt them spiritually by our beliefs. On the one hand, we are not to think of them as being less than ourselves in the eyes of God because of what they believe. But now, on the other hand, we are not to display our beliefs in such a way as to cause them to stumble.

What does God mean by "stumble?" What exactly is an "occasion to fall?" First, let's understand what it DOESN'T mean: It doesn't mean that I must cater to the religious bias of another. It doesn't mean that if someone is indignant towards me because of what I believe, or because of what I am doing, that I must draw back. Not at all. Look at Jesus. The Pharisees were greatly offended at His teaching, and yet He taught all the more -- to the

total disregard of their offense. There must therefore be a distinction between offending people like the Pharisees, and hurting the type of person of which Paul speaks in this verse. What is that distinction?

The distinction lies, not just with my attitude -- for that is vitally important -- but with the heart attitude of the other person. The Bible reveals that I am NOT obligated to come under the religious demands and personal opinions of any other person -- especially if that person is spiritually biased and hard of heart. I should not, of course, ever go out of my way to try to spite them. No. I am to love them. But that's the point. Towards a person like that, it IS love to refuse their demands. Jesus LOVED the Pharisees as much as any of the disciples. But He refused to act the way they demanded.

How could it be love to act to the disregard of one making spiritual demands upon me? Because to allow myself to be controlled by them is never love towards them. To the contrary, to refuse their demands IS love. It is a refusal to cooperate with them in their error. It is a stand AGAINST the hardness of heart with governs them -- all with the purpose of helping them get set free. I can help no tyrant by obeying him. Obeying a tyrant simply strengthens his resolve and serves to verify to him that he is right in what he is doing.

The "catch" in all of this is that most of us don't allow God to do a work in US so that we can refuse to obey people like this in an attitude of love. Instead we do it in an attitude of spite and superiority. Some of us would love the chance to be contrary to a present day Pharisee. But if that is our attitude, it really doesn't matter what we do, we are wrong. Our attitude is no better than theirs.

We are to walk according to love. If love means I must refuse the demands of a Pharisee, then I should refuse them -- but not because I love the refusal. I should refuse because I love the Pharisee. Likewise, if my submission to the religious beliefs of another constitutes the love of God for them, then I should submit. It is always love that dictates.

This brings us to the type of case Paul mentions in chapter 14. If my brother is weak in faith, and my display of strength in faith hurts him, then I shouldn't display it. I should instead submit myself to whatever love dictates.

This doesn't mean that I lie about what I believe, or that I must compromise with Truth. It simply means that I do not exercise my liberty along a certain line if it upsets the faith of my brother. Note that. God isn't telling us to do bad things if good things offend someone. No. He is saying that if the good thing offends someone, don't do anything right now, or do

something else which doesn't offend. God has not given us freedom so that we can use it to hurt those who aren't free.

The question, of course, is as to HOW what I do could actually hurt another person spiritually? Understanding that is important, because it defines the type of person talked about in this chapter. A person who is "weak in the faith," and who "stumbles" at the freedom of another, is NOT a Pharisee. He is not someone who is religiously bias, legalistically demanding, or hard of heart. This is someone who is ignorant of the Truth, and who, because of his lack of personal stability in God, looks to other people for stability. He puts his faith, not totally in Christ, but to a greater or lesser degree in other Christians. And when those other Christians contradict his beliefs, his faith falls.

Relying upon other Christians, instead of upon Christ, is common to a person who is weak in faith. It is one of their primary characteristics. We can know this because if they are stumbled by I do, then they must certainly be looking to me. But amazingly, their stumbling is not so much in their walk with me, but in their walk with Christ. Why? Because they have made their faith in Christ dependent upon me. Not being totally certain about what they believe, they look to me for verification. And if I don't go along with them in my conduct, the verification is gone, and so is the faith.

There is also a related way in which I could cause someone to stumble by practicing my freedom in their presence. Despite the fact that what I am doing is the Truth, and is being done in faith, another person may not have the faith and understanding to practice it in the proper motivation. They may imitate my actions, but not my intent. And because what they do is not OF faith, it will be of sin.

Let's take Paul's example of eating meat offered to idols. If I eat such meat freely and openly in front of one who thought it was wrong to do so, he may follow my example -- despite the fact that his convictions, as mislead as they may be, are telling him otherwise. In the eyes of God, this is wrong for him to do. It's not his actions that are wrong, mind you, but the choice he made in his heart. He made the choice to do something he believes is wrong before God. The fact that it is really ok doesn't matter because the moral choice he made was against what he believed was right.

Do you see something here? A moral choice is completely separate from the actual facts. It has to be this way, or it would be ok to go around continuously violating our conscience. That can't be. Our conscience is not the criteria for the Truth. But God never tells us to ignore it. He tells us to keep them open and exposed to God so that He can conform them to the

Truth. Part of keeping them open and exposed is never to violate them. We need to obey them, praying that God will show us the Truth.

God doesn't want us relying upon others. He wants us to rely upon Christ. But He also knows His people are going to look to others, especially as babes in Christ. So, in order to give them time to get their own stability, He tells us not to "kick the crutch out from under them." He says, "For the sake of love, limit your freedom so that, in time, that person may grow strong enough to obtain the same freedom."

Paul said, "I am under the authority of no man, but a slave to all for the sake of Christ." That perfectly applies here. We are never to allow any man to dictate our walk with Christ. We are absolutely free to refuse to obey any man, Christian leader, or layman. But if we are TRULY free, and know the Truth, then we are likewise free to submit -- if that submission constitutes the love of God for that person. Again, the love of God dictates. This requires that we allow God to do a work in us, that we might have the freedom to walk in this love.

One Biblical example of this Truth will suffice. The apostle Paul was said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." (Gal. 6:15, also see Gal. 5:6) He also disputed with certain Christian Jews who demanded that Gentiles had to be circumcised to become Christians. (see Acts 15:1-2) Yet read Acts 16:1-4. There it says that Paul circumcised Timothy "because of the Jews which were in those quarters, for they knew all that his father was a Greek." If we didn't know the Truth revealed in Romans 14, we might conclude that Paul was wishy-washy, and had given into peer pressure. He argues against the necessity of circumcision on the one hand, and then gives into those who believed in the necessity of circumcision on the other. But no. Paul was walking in love. He would not give into those who, because of hardness of heart, demanded he follow their religious beliefs. Giving into them would not constitute love. They needed someone to stand against them. But then later, the situation changed. There were other Jews, weak in faith, or with no faith at all, who would not be able to understand a Christianity without circumcision. So Paul, for the sake of these who were ignorant, circumcised Timothy. He did what was necessary to gain a footing for the gospel.

Did Paul sin? How could it be right to circumcise Timothy when Paul knew full well that it wasn't necessary? Wasn't that a misrepresentation of the Truth?

Paul acted properly. Read again his words from Galatians: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything." The point is, while

circumcision is not necessary, neither is it a sin. It may profit you nothing to be circumcised, but it also profits you nothing to be uncircumcised. Either way it doesn't matter. So Paul didn't do wrong at all. He simply did something which was totally unnecessary for the sake of those who thought it necessary. In that case, love overrides the full exercising of freedom.

Freedom is like that. I may be free to NOT do many things. But if I am free to NOT do them, I am also free to DO them -- for the sake of love. Likewise I may be free to DO many things that I will NOT do for the sake of love. We are not here speaking of sinful, vulgar things. Those can never be practiced for the sake of love. We are talking about issue over which I can limit my freedom for the sake of someone weak in faith.

14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself. But to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Here we find an important principle repeated many times in the Bible. It is important that we know the Truth, for that alone can set us free. But no one knows all Truth, or even close to it. It is therefore a fact that God looks at what we do with what we believe -- even if it is incorrect -- just as much as He looks at what we do with what we believe if it IS correct. The reason? What we do with what we believe reveals our heart attitude. A ignorant person with a right heart attitude is preferable to a person who knows much Truth, but who, because of the Truth he has, has a heart filled with pride.

14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of.

14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

14:18 For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.

14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Note verse 14:17 and the priority it gives for our living. The details of the things we do are NOT the essence of the kingdom of God. The essence of the kingdom is what we ARE. The motivation and effect of my living is much more important than the actual actions themselves.

This clashes with the legalistic nature of some Christians. "You MUST do this, follow this principle, or keep this law, or you will be out of the will of God!" No. Rather, we must walk in love. And if love means keeping rules we don't HAVE to keep, well then so be it. But if love means breaking rules then so be it, too. This does not mean we compromise with the Truth. It means that for the sake of the Truth in the lives of others, we either limit our freedom or display it. We do whatever the wisdom of God tells us to do.

The usual objection to this Truth is that it opens the door to "anything goes." But if that's what we think it does, then we don't understand the love of God. If we are walking in love, we aren't going to sin, compromise with the Truth, or do anything else which departs from the character of Jesus Christ. We are going to do that which "makes for peace," and which "edifies," or "builds up" others in Christ.

To "build up" in Christ means to strengthen someone in Christ for themselves. It means to spiritually add another "brick" to their spiritual building, so that it can stand on it's own. The Body of Christ is not comprised of a group of people who are so reliant upon each other -- or a leader -- that they have no strength to stand alone, or have lost their individual relationship with God. No. That is an old, time-worn, heresy. The Body of Christ is composed of members, each of whom are strong enough to stand alone with God; each of whom have an individual relationship with Christ, but who, BECAUSE OF THAT, are able to edify others towards the same. The Body only functions properly if each part is directly and individually reliant and submitted first to the Head -- not first to each other.

14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things are indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eats with offense.

14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.

Everything God has created is good and, in itself, pure. It is the USE of the thing which makes it impure. Accordingly, even the freedom God has given me in Christ can be USED in a wrong way. If the use of my freedom hurts another person spiritually then it does not glorify God, nor does it love

another. It's use, is, in that case, sin.

14:22 Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemns not himself in that thing which he allows.

14:23 And he that doubts is damned (judged against) if he eat, because he eats not of faith. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Note the individuality expressed in these verses. We are not required to have the faith of another, that is, another person, no matter his supposed spiritual position, has no right to dictate our faith or our convictions. The faith we have we are to have to ourselves before God. And whatever is not of faith -- our faith, not the faith of another -- is sin.

Verse 14:23 states a Truth vital to grasp. We saw it earlier. I may believe many false things, but if my heart is right before God, then I am not judged as being wrong with God. WHAT I believe is less important that WHETHER I live up to my beliefs -- in faith as unto the Lord. If I do live up to them, God is not going to leave me in error. My heart attitude of sincerity gives Him the material necessary to eventually set me free into the Truth.

This may sound strange to us. We may envision someone who is steeped in error, and wonder how that could be acceptable to God. Well, ask: How do you know you aren't steeped in error? Remember, that other person over there whom you think is so wrong believes he is right. Perhaps he is on some things. And furthermore, even if you now possess much Truth, did you start out that way? Certainly all of us have at one time or another been steeped in error. Thankfully, God took us where we were and brought us out.

Faith is to be in God, not in doctrines about Him. My faith is to be in Jesus Christ, not in my ability to believe Him. If my faith is in God, and I am in error about some of the things I believe, God will bring me on. But if I am conceited and hard of heart, the accuracy of my beliefs won't matter. My spiritual condition will be my downfall.

Jesus said, "If any man will His will, he shall know of the doctrine..." (see John 7:17) The way to know whether something about God is true is to be willing to surrender to Him -- whether I know what my surrender will mean or not. I can surrender to God beforehand with an open heart. That's what God is after.

Expanded Commentary on Romans 14:15-21

Unity in the Truth

But if I tarry long, that thou may know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:15)

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. (2 Cor 13:8)

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (1 John 2:21)

I'm not sure what is more important than the Truth. Of course, I'm speaking in a Christian context, but really, truth is likewise the most important thing in ANY field. For example, if you operate in error regarding gravity or other law of physics, what will happen? If you lack the Truth about economics or accounting, then what? If you live in error with regards to your family relationships it will likewise result in many bad consequences. How much more essential is the Truth in our relationship with God, and with other Christians!

In the church today, we live in a day and age where Truth doesn't matter anymore. What does matter is church growth, people feeling good about themselves, signs and wonders, and political correctness. Add all of these things up and not only do they mean Truth doesn't matter, but they mean Truth is to be despised. For once Truth matters, all of the rest of these things must be adjusted to the Truth. And all of them will be exposed as error and purged out of the church.

Jesus Christ said, "I am the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life." He likewise said, "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free." Do the math. If I think Truth doesn't matter, then I think Jesus doesn't matter, for HE is the Truth. And if I think Truth doesn't matter, then I think freedom doesn't matter – for the Truth sets me free. Furthermore, read the gospels and the epistles. In them you find a continual contention by Jesus and the apostles FOR the Truth. In the end, it cost them their lives. Truth matters. Indeed, Truth is everything.

Truth IS

Truth exists because God exists. Because there is an Absolute Being, there is absolute Truth. Indeed, it is only by knowing HIM that we can know the Truth – it is only by knowing Him that we have a frame of reference for all else.

This is why God is described as LIGHT. It is why Jesus said, "I am the Truth." Truth is described in doctrines and communicated through teaching. But in the end, Truth is God Himself.

This brings us to a conclusion that cannot be avoided. It is a conclusion that ought to be so self-evident that it should form the foundation of ALL ELSE. And yet the moment you hear it, you will know that even in churches today such a statement would be controversial. That conclusion is this: Truth is not optional. It is central. Indeed, if you believe that the Truth is unnecessary you are already deceived. If you believe that knowing the Truth is impossible or unimportant, you are already deceived. If you believe that knowing the Truth takes second place to anything in the Christian walk, you are already in danger. There is nothing more vital, essential, and central to walking with Jesus Christ than is the Truth. To say anything else is a LIE.

Do we realize that one of the many ways in which we could, in a sentence, describe the purpose of Jesus Christ, is to say that He came to restore the Truth? Sure. Even His Redemption was, in one sense, unto that end. How? Well, obviously, the Redemptive work of Christ was not merely a doctrinal statement. It was an actual breaking of the realm of darkness, and the ushering in of resurrection life. But as it pertains to Truth, the Redemption made it not only possible for you and I to know Truth – the Redemption made it possible for you and I to be MADE TRUE.

Now ask: How could you and I be MADE TRUE to God, and restored back to the relationship God always intended, unless we know God IN TRUTH? Indeed, how can you and I walk with God – the God who is THE TRUTH – unless we know the Truth about Him?

The bottom line is this: Christianity – when everything is said and done – IS THE TRUTH. Have we recognized this? What we call Christianity is God's revelation of Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ – made real to us, in us, and through us. Therefore, once you say Truth doesn't matter, you are denying the very essence of Christianity itself.

Truth Divides

There are thousands of professing Christians today who are convinced that as long as UNITY is preserved, they are on the right track. They grab out of the Bible verses that tell us that unity is God's will, and they translate that to mean, "unity at all cost." Thus, if you preach the essential of uncompromising Truth, these people will accuse you of dividing the Body of Christ. They will say that you are, "judging." They will make you out to be the bad guy.

Let's be very clear about some things. First, it is possible to have perfect unity in ERROR. There is such a thing as group deception, or church deception. And where that is the case, everyone will say the same thing – the WRONG thing. Everyone will have the same mind – the WRONG mind. And most of these places will seek to preserve that unity in error – because it cannot be preserved unless THEY force it. They will grab verses and passages out of the Bible that encourage unity. But the problem is not that they need to preserve unity. The problem is that they have no Truth.

Isn't it amazing how the teaching of the Bible cannot even apply to us unless we have the right foundation? For example, when Paul teaches that we should all have the same mind, and say the same thing, he means THE TRUTH. He doesn't mean ERROR. Thus, if the church to which I belong doesn't know the Truth, but teaches error, these commands by Paul do not apply. Commands to speak the same thing cannot apply unless that SAME THING that is being spoken is the Truth. Paul is NOT saying, "All of you need to be in agreement. It doesn't matter if what you agree upon is the Truth. All that matters is that you agree." Nonsense. The only solution in such cases is that the entire foundation of error be broken, and a new one be established in Truth. Until then, commands to speak the same thing don't apply. Ones that command that we know the Truth DO apply.

And yet, as mentioned, Christian people continue to harp on unity, and ignore the Truth. This is a blindness and a deception. It comes directly from, "the father of lies." What could please Satan more than to have a group of people who are completely deceived, and yet in complete unity in that deception? What could make him happier than to have people who brag about their unity, and yet who have no consciousness that their unity is in error and heresy?

Therefore, we need to get this straight: Christianity unity means NOTHING – if that unity is in error. It means nothing GOOD, that is. The only kind of Christian unity that is according to the will of God is unity that is in the Truth.

Now, this ought to clear up the meaning of a few Bible verses. For example, what did Jesus say about the INITIAL IMPACT He would have upon unity?

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Mat 10:34-39)

Can we see what Jesus is saying? He is saying that wherever He is preached, and wherever He enters the picture, all unity that is NOT in Himself; that is NOT in the Truth, is going to be disturbed, toppled, and hopefully destroyed. But unto what end? Well, in order that a NEW ORDER and a TRUE UNITY might be formed in Himself.

How could it be otherwise? If I am in a church or group, where the Truth is NOT being preached, or where the Truth is NOT important – where error reigns – then there isn't any way to deal with such a thing until the unity in apathy and error is broken. And it is a fact that the Truth will always expose and break error. Always.

Truth is NEVER neutral. It is NEVER anything but absolute and total. The Truth ALWAYS divides between light and darkness. Any church that has a foundation of error is going to absolutely be divided if the Truth is introduced! And that is a GOOD thing.

I can tell you what will happen if Truth is introduced in a place of darkness. First, those standing in Truth will be attacked. Second, TWO lines will form. One will consist of all those who desire the Truth. The other line will consist of those who don't. And I will also promise you that many people will refuse to stand in EITHER line – which, if they only knew it, is really equal to standing in the line with those who don't want the Truth. If the place that Truth is introduced is a church, many people will leave. Perhaps the pastor will be fired if it is him that introduces the Truth. But Truth always divides. It must divide – in fact, God WANTS it to divide if things are initially unified in error or apathy.

If you have ever entered a creepy, old abandoned house, and gone down the cellar with a flashlight, you will know what I mean. Shine that light into a place where darkness has become normal, and what happens? All the critters scatter and run for the darkness! Pardon my French – but this IS Biblical – if you shine the light of God upon any place of darkness all HELL is going to break loose. And I do mean HELL. Have we forgotten that there are spiritual forces behind these situations?

What applies to the group applies to the individual. If I am a person who is comfortable, apathetic, and really doesn't want to be bothered with Truth, then how must God initially deal with me? He must disturb my self-contained unity. He must upset my life. He must put me in a situation where I MUST find the Truth – or choose greater darkness.

It is an understatement, but we simply do not know that we don't know. We are blind. Many THINK they know the Truth, but they don't. The only way in which God can deal with us, and set us free, is to disturb us. But even then, some won't turn to God. They walk into greater darkness.

I really believe that many in the Body of Christ do not want to be personally accountable to God. TRUTH will always require this – for to know the Truth means more than just knowing true doctrine. It means to be MADE TRUE TO GOD. And that means standing in the light. Many will NOT be exposed before the Lord – they simply won't have it. But this same light will also reveal to us the Truth about God. It is simply not possible to separate the two – if you want to know the Truth, you must be made true. In effect, our knowledge of the Truth ties directly to our willingness to be accountable to God Himself in Truth.

So what we see in all of this is that DIVISION is good, and GOD-ORDAINED, if the division is caused by the presence of Jesus Christ – if the division is caused by the Truth. It is good because Truth will break up all unity in error, for the purpose of salvaging those who respond to it, and establishing a new unity in Christ.

Truth Unites

Truth will break up error. But Truth will unite those who are made true by it. And this unity will not need, and cannot be, FORCED. You don't need to force unity among those who are individually centered in Christ.

There have always been groups and churches who force unity with religious laws, rules, and legalism. Sure. You can force unity by establishing, "accountability principles," and fear tactics, and peer pressure. But none of it will be REAL. Real unity is in Christ – in the Truth.

Unity in the Body of Christ, if it is real, is the result of EACH individual having a relationship with Christ – in Truth – that rightly relates them to each other individual who have a relationship with Christ -- in Truth. That is communion and fellowship. Thus, the very basis of body unity is each individual's relationship with Jesus.

This is so often distorted. Many people continue to think that in order to have communion with each other, we must forfeit or relinquish our personal relationship with Christ – to whatever degree it takes to keep the unity. No. In reality, EACH believer needs to be presented mature in Christ. And then, unity will be the outcome. The Body of Christ will only function according to the Truth to the degree that the members know the Truth.

There is an important principle in all of this, as it relates to some of these errors about unity. That principle is this: The wrong kind of unity will always strip the individual believer of their personal relationship with Christ. The wrong kind of unity will cast the individual adrift, at best, or make them unable to function as an individual at worst in the Lord. But the right kind of unity will work towards BUILDING UP EACH believer in Christ. And if EACH believer is built up in Christ, the BODY will be strong as a unit.

I have known of places where almost no one has a healthy personal relationship with Christ – and yet they all glory in this, thinking that their submission to leadership IS that personal relationship. That is deception.

Any leader who tells you that you cannot be right with God, or grow in Christ, or find God's full purpose – unless you come to God through THEM, submit to THEM, or sit at their feet – that leader is a false teacher. Indeed, if a leader is right with God, and a true servant of God, they will seek to make others strong in Christ for themselves. They will seek to make themselves as useless as possible, if you know what I mean, so that each believer can be presented mature in Christ.

The Truth

The only alternative to knowing the Truth is deception. Note that – the ONLY alternative to Truth is error. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot sit on the fence. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would seek to guide us into all Truth. The question is – are we open for this work?

If you haven't noticed, more and more today, the Truth is being sacrificed on the altar of religious unity. Indeed, those who insist on the Truth are now the bad guys. I realize that some who insist on the Truth do it in an unloving way. But the Word of God nevertheless commands, "Speak the Truth in love." There is no compromise with Truth if you love Jesus.

God warned us of these times all through the Bible:

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; (1 Tim 4:1-2)

A, "seducing spirit," is one that has something attractive about it, such that it is able to lead someone away from the Truth – all the while they THINK it is the Truth. Sure. Satan always appears as an angel of light. And doctrines of demons? Does that sound serious to you? Well, we have been warned, haven't we? It is all right there, in our Bible. And yet look how many people – and sadly, many of them quite young – are being led astray into these false revivals. Look at how many today don't even TALK about the Truth. It isn't even on the table for discussion.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Tim 4:1-4)

Here we see instruction as to the responsibility God has given His people. For those who DO know the Truth, we are not to remain neutral. We are to proclaim it with whatever means God provides. You will note that this is a CHARGE BEFORE GOD. Again, do you think this is serious? Actually, it is a matter of spiritual LIFE and DEATH.

The church is supposed to be the PILLAR and GROUND of the Truth. Get that. The church is supposed to be the living representation of the Truth – as a witness unto Christ Himself. And if we are NOT? Well, then we are a FALSE

witness unto Christ. That is not a pretty picture. But it is a fact that needs to be faced.

We are in the middle of the great apostasy. But none of us need be part of it. It is always possible to turn to God for the Truth. And if we do, He will be faithful.

Romans

Chapter 15

One Mind

The first part of chapter 15 should probably have been included at the end of chapter 14. It continues the subject of walking in love towards others. Paul then concludes the chapter by reaffirming his ministry to the Gentiles, and by assuring us that they are on the same par as Israel under the New Covenant.

15: 1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. And not to please ourselves.

15: 2 Let everyone of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

15: 3 For even Christ pleased not Himself, but, as it is written, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee, fell on me."

How might I make the mistake of bearing the infirmity of another "to please myself?" The most common way would be to use it to gain admiration, a following, material possession, or to make that person reliant upon me. I could even bear their infirmity because it "makes me feel good about myself." But despite the fact that these wrong motives are commonly practiced today in many Christian circles, God tells us they should never be our motivation for helping others. God says we should put on the mind of Christ. We should bear the infirmities of other Christians out of love; because Christ bore ours.

15: 4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.

15: 5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.

15: 6 That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15: 7 Wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us, to the

glory of God.

Verses 15:5-6 describe unity in the Body of Christ. But note that the "one mind" and "one mouth" do not necessitate perfect agreement as to opinion. They necessitate oneness of heart towards God, reflected in the things which Paul has been talking about in the prior verses. I am free to live my Christian life and hold my opinions about God even if other do not agree. But true freedom will also allow me to identify with God's interests in other Christians, and make me a true bondsman on God on their behalf.

15: 8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the Truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.

Jesus was born "under the law," as a "minister of the circumcision," because God had promised Him through Abraham. All through the gospels we find Him speaking as a Jew, and bringing to fulness all that God had intended in the Old Covenant. Of course this clashed with many of the traditional ideas of the time, since those traditions were ignorant of the real heart and intent of God.

15: 9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written, "For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name."

15:10 And again He says, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people."

15:11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud him, all ye people."

15:12 And again Isaiah says, "There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles. In Him shall the Gentiles trust."

15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Truth that the Gentiles were included in the plan of salvation was, of course, the most radical concept which could have been presented to the first century Jew. We can scarcely grasp how foreign a thought this was to them. Yet there it was, revealed all through the Old Testament. It is ironic

that the "experts" of the day, the Pharisees, those who were so versed in scripture, could have been blind to it. But they were. The traditions of men had blinded them. We need to beware, lest our religious traditions also blind us to many of the important Truths God has for us.

15:14 And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

15:15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God.

15:16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sancified by the Holy Ghost.

15:17 I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

15:18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed.

15:19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of god, so that from Jerusalem and round unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

15:20 Yea, so I have strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.

Paul here rehearses his calling. Note especially verse 15:18. Paul has determined that only those things which he has personally experienced will he dare share as part of his message. Also, he says, he has not been called to "build upon another man's foundation." In other words, God has given him a calling and a message. That calling and message is one God has worked in him personally. He has no intention of going around speaking the words and experience of some other teacher.

This is a message for all Christians. It is so easy to become focused upon one or two teachers, to the point where we do little more than parrot their

message. There are those who actually become "mouthpieces" of other teachers. But this isn't what God wants from us. He wants us to let Him work a message unto us personally -- a message that may not be exactly like that of another -- but nevertheless a message of the Truth. It is always unwise to preach someone else's message -- even if it is of the Truth. If I haven't personally experienced the Truth of that message, I will have no real point of reference for it, and in time, I will become a hinderance to the Truth in it.

15:21 But as it is written, "To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see, and they that have not heard shall understand."

15:22 For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

15:23 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you,

15:24 Whenever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you, for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

15:25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.

15:26 For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

15:27 It has pleased them verily, and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

15:28 When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.

Paul states a principle in verse 15:27 which is often blown out of proportion and made into a terrible bondage. He simply says that if someone has ministered to you spiritually, that it is only right that you share some physical blessing with them, namely, an offering of money, food, etc. It is NOT a command to do so, but simply a statement of spiritual etiquette.

Note that there is no mention here of the so-called tithing law. Neither is

it mentioned in any of the other places in the epistles where the support of the ministry, or need of the saints, is mentioned. Why? Those are perfect opportunities for Paul to quote the OT tithing scriptures. But he NEVER does. He doesn't because tithing is NOT a New Testament requirement. Giving is.

That Truth is not believed by thousands of Christians today, nor by thousands of ordained ministers. But it is nevertheless an irrefutable Truth of God, and of the freedom He has given us in Christ.

15:29 And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

15:30 Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

15:31 That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.

15:32 That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

15:33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Not only did the apostle Paul need prayer, but he needed it more than most people. Some of us think that the "more spiritual" we are, the stronger we are -- thus, the less we need prayer. No. The more spiritual we are, the greater the burdens, and the weaker we see ourselves to be. All the more we need the prayers of ourselves and others.

Never imagine that a calling to public ministry is glamorous. Those who have a glamorous time in such a position are likely not there by the hand of God, or have somehow side-stepped His real calling. That type of calling from God led virtually everyone of the apostles to their death. It placed upon them burdens and persecutions. We see that here in verse 15:31. Paul was the one out front, preaching the gospel, and had those who hated his message to contend with on all sides.

Romans

Chapter 16

The Saints

Chapter 16 contains little teaching. It does, however, give us the names of many of Paul's acquaintances and friends. The chapter, and letter, concludes by saying, "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."

16: 1 I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchreae,

16: 2 That you receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatsoever business she has need of you. For she has been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

This Phoebe actually helped to comfort the apostle in his need. Quite a person. Paul here wants to assure the Romans of her spiritual worth.

16: 3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus.

16: 4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Priscilla and Aquila evidently hid, or protected Paul, from certain people and governing authorities. The penalty for doing this in that day was often death.

16: 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

16: 6 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor upon us.

16: 7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsman, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

16: 8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.

- 16: 9 Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.**
- 16:10 Salute Apelles, approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.**
- 16:11 Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.**
- 16:12 Salute Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord.**
- 16:13 Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.**
- 16:14 Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.**
- 16:15 Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.**
- 16:16 Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.**

Thirty people does Paul mention in this passage. Their names have been recorded by God for two thousand years.

- 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them.**
- 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.**

The word "mark" means to "spy out" or "investigate." In other words, keep and eye on them. Find out what they are doing. Paul says that people like this are serving themselves -- doing what they are doing for some kind of self-gain.

It is important that we understand verse 16:17 in the proper setting. After all, Jesus said He came, not to bring peace, but to cause division. (see Matt.

10:34-36) And we sure wouldn't be right to "mark" Him! REAL "division" has to be that which disturbs REAL "unity." And the only REAL unity is unity in Jesus Christ. All other unity isn't unity at all. Therefore division which disturbs false unity -- that is -- unity in something or someone other than Christ, is NOT what Paul is talking about here. He is talking about those who seek to pry Christians away from Christ to themselves, or to some cause they plead.

The realness of my "unity" is the issue. Jehovah's Witnesses quote this scripture and will disfellowship anyone who causes division in their midst; even one who is telling them the Truth about their errors. But this scripture doesn't apply to them because the unity they possess isn't God's unity. They have false unity; a unity in a false Jesus. Therefore, division is God's will for them. Isn't it ironic that, in the eyes of God, unity in falsehood is actually division from Christ? But it is. Any unity outside of Christ is division. The only true unity is under the True Head.

True division is that which interferes with a believers relationship with Jesus Christ, and in Christ, with other believers. There are those people, always with a wonderful way with words, able to preach and teach from scripture, who are able to deceive others in such a way. One common way is to convince believers that the only way to Christ is through them, or through what they teach. This causes division because it makes access to God contingent upon certain man-made conditions. Such teaching is contrary to the gospel of God's free grace.

Paul says to "avoid" such people. Contrary to what some Christians think, it is not always God's will for us to "reconcile" with everyone. That's because to "reconcile" and have a relationship with people who cause divisions will require that I compromise with the Truth. People who cause divisions have a problem between themselves and God, and if I try to become reconciled with them in Christ, I am liable to become reconciled to their problem. I am liable to send a message to others that what they are doing is right, or send a message to those causing the division that what they are doing is right. I will simply make the problem worse.

This is a situation where avoiding someone is the highest love, not only for them, but for those around me. Only if I avoid such people can God have greater freedom to work in them. Notice that I am always to LOVE them. But love, in these cases, means to avoid them.

16:19 For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf, but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good,

and simple concerning evil.

16:20 And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Today's mentality states that the way to deal with evil is to become acquainted with it. But God says that the way to deal with evil is to know the good. Sensitivity to sin is never the result of sinning. Hardly, the more I sin, the less sensitive I become to it. But the more I refuse sin in favor of God's holiness, the more sensitive I become to it. That's because sin becomes more and more a foreign concept to me.

16:21 Timothy my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.

16:22 I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.

16:23 Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, salute you, Eratus the chamberlain of the city salute you, and Quartus a brother.

16:24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Earlier Paul gave greetings to those to whom he writes. Now he gives it from those with him.

16:25 Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.

16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting god, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

16:27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

God did reveal his plan for the church, the Gentiles, and for believers in the Old Testament, but it was veiled. Now He speaks more plainly. God's intention is for all men to believe and come to the knowledge of the Truth in Jesus Christ.

