

# Exposition of Romans

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## I. Introduction (1:1–17)

Today, we begin our verse-by-verse study of Romans. In this letter, Paul encourages the Roman believers to unite to help him reach others with the gospel. In Romans, Paul writes the fullest explanation of the gospel found in any of his epistles. Regarding this, Martin Luther wrote:

*This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest gospel. It is well-worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word-for-word, but also to occupy himself with it daily as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. We find in this letter then, the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know—the meaning of law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross. We learn how we are to act toward everyone—toward the virtuous and the sinful, toward the strong and the weak, friend and foe, and toward ourselves.<sup>1</sup>*

No doubt, Paul expounds on the gospel in Romans. Paul's commitment to "full expression" can be seen even in his introduction.

- The introduction to Romans contains opening greetings (1–7), a thanksgiving (8–15), and a thesis (16–17).
- It is a thorough introduction!

This morning, we will look at the greeting.

- It is found in one long sentence that goes from verses 1–7.
- In our modern world, we typically sign letters at the end.
- Ancient letters, however, were addressed at the beginning with author and recipient listed at the front so the reader did not have to open the scroll very far to identify the letter!

As we begin, let us look at the initial greetings in some other Pauline Epistles. I will mark **in red** where Paul identifies the **author** and **recipients**.

- 1 Corinthians – **Paul**, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, **to the church of God that is in Corinth.**
- 2 Corinthians – **Paul**, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **to the church of God that is at Corinth.**
- Ephesians – **Paul**, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God **to the saints who are in Ephesus.**
- Philippians – **Paul** and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **to all the saints in Christ who are in Philippi.**
- Colossians – **Paul**, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.**
- 1 Thessalonians – **Paul**, Silvanus, and Timothy, **to the church of the Thessalonians.**
- 2 Thessalonians – **Paul**, Silvanus, and Timothy, **to the church of the Thessalonians.**

Now, compare those to Romans:

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<sup>1</sup> This excerpt is from a translation of Luther's *Preface to the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*.

- Romans – *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.*

**How do these opening greetings compare?** Well, two things stick out.

- First, in each one Paul identifies himself as **author** very early and then closes the greeting by describing the **recipients** (see red letters above). They are all similar that way!
- Second, the words between the **author** and **recipients** are much longer in Romans than his other letters (see black letters above). That is how Romans' greeting differs from all the rest!
  - Most of Paul's letters have just a few words (*five or six in the original*) between the **author** and **recipients**.
  - Romans, however, inserts 71 words (in the original) between the identification of the **author** and the **recipients**.<sup>2</sup>

So, this is where we dig in to find out why. Why does Paul expand the opening? What are these "black words" about and why are they important for the Romans or us?

Well, let's read them and then ask God to show us this morning!

#### **A. Opening greetings: uncovering the nature of the gospel (1:1–7)<sup>3</sup>**

Paul's opening greeting to the Romans is organized about what he says about himself and the Romans.

##### **1. Paul (1–6)**

Paul describes more about himself than about the Romans in the greeting. That is, most of the greeting is about Paul, telling us more about him.

- This is not just my opinion or theory; it is clearly demonstrated by the grammar!
- One commentator also agrees. He writes: "Paul adds an unusual amount of material to his self-identification."<sup>4</sup>

So, in verses 1–6, Paul uncovers more about himself, specifically his identity (1) and message (2–6).

##### **a. His identity (1) – <sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God**

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<sup>2</sup> The longest Pauline greetings other than Romans are Titus (46 words between author and recipients) and Galatians (23 words).

<sup>3</sup> Johnson outlines the introduction in this same way. He writes, "The opening section of Romans consists of the greeting (1:1–7), the thanksgiving (1:8–15), and the thesis statement that begins the body of the letter (1:16–17)." Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary*, 93.

He starts with his self-identification in verse 1. Before we look closely at verse 1, let me ask you a question: **Who are you?**

- We often define ourselves by 1) **our relationships** to other people or by 2) **what we do**—our occupation.
- So, **we** respond: “I am Jeff, the husband of \_\_\_\_\_, father of \_\_\_\_\_, son of \_\_\_\_\_ and I work at \_\_\_\_\_.”

For Paul, however, everything revolves around Christ. Paul’s life changed dramatically when he met Christ—everything changed so that his whole identity became wrapped up in Jesus!

I like how John Piper talks about verse 1.

- He says that Paul is not *actually* answering the question: “Who am I?”
- Instead, he answers: “Whose am I?”
  - **Look at the verse.**
  - Paul is a servant “of Christ Jesus,” “called [by God] to be an apostle,” “separated [by God] to the gospel of God.”
- So, Paul’s identity is all about “Whose he is!”
  - Remember, men and women, boys and girls, if you are saved—if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then “you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.”
  - Whose are you?

I was so proud of my son, Andrew, last year.

- He was being interviewed by the head coach of a “D1” football program.
- We had met with everyone else and received a tour of the whole facility and campus of his future university, but then the head coach asked him a question.
- It was a fairly intimidating scene and the question was: “How important is football to you?”
- Andrew said something like this: “Well, coach, football is *very* important to me, and you can be assured that I will give it everything I have! I will work harder than others. Football is not, however, *the most important thing!* You see, I am a Christian and my life is for Jesus!”
- The coach took a few seconds to reflect and with a smile said, “You know, you will not be alone on this team. There are more here like you!”
  - I guess other young men had demonstrated that their identity was wrapped up in Jesus too!
  - It’s our prayer that his coach someday can say the same thing!

Now, Paul portrays his self-identity with three descriptions in verse 1. Each of these descriptions deserves attention.

### 1) **He is a slave.**

He starts out by giving his name, Paul, and then immediately joins it with a phrase in apposition: “Paul, servant of Christ Jesus.”

- This is the immediate way he identifies himself—the first point he makes with others about his identity.
- He is “servant of Christ Jesus.”

The word **servant** (δοῦλος) is a common word for servant or slave in the NT. Paul’s motivations to describe himself to the Romans in this way might include the following:

- **First, Paul might do this to connect with his Roman audience.**
  - Grant Osborne estimates that 85–90% of Rome’s population was composed of slaves.<sup>5</sup>
  - So, they think, “This great Apostle is just like us—a slave.”
- **Second, Paul might describe himself as “servant of Christ Jesus” to identify himself with the “servants of Yahweh” in the Old Testament.**
  - John Murray says that it was the OT that most informs Paul here—that Paul is joining in a long line of “servants of God” in Scripture.<sup>6</sup>
  - In the OT, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and many other prophets were identified as “servants of Yahweh” and thus spokespeople for him.
  - So, Paul *serves* and *speaks* for Jesus his master as the prophets served and spoke for Yahweh.

## 2) He is an apostle.

With this foundational understanding of Paul’s identity in place, he continues. He is “called to be an apostle” (κλητὸς ἀπόστολος).

- The word apostle was a special term in the Greco-Roman culture which identified an ambassador or appointed messenger—an authoritative delegate.
- When used in Scripture, this word speaks of a special representative of Jesus who saw him and *was sent by* him.
- Now, Paul did not assume this identity on his own. He makes that clear!
  - He was called to be an apostle.
  - God summoned him as official representative of Jesus.
- At times throughout Paul’s writings, he vigorously defended this apostleship (e.g., *1 Cor 9, 2 Cor 12, Gal 1*); here, however, he establishes it.

When writing to a group of people he’s never met but are clearly under his authority, he declares that he is a “called apostle” of Jesus.

## 3) He is separated to the gospel.

Then, Paul reveals what his call to apostleship involved in the next phrase—he had been “separated unto the gospel of God” (ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ).

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<sup>5</sup> Grant Osborne, *Romans*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 2.

Before his conversion, Paul was **separated** from sinners as a Pharisee.<sup>7</sup>

- God, however, changed all that!
- God separated him to something else!
- God set apart Paul for “the special purpose or activity of proclaiming the gospel.”<sup>8</sup>
  - This is the one thing that Paul’s apostolic calling involved.
  - He was set apart to proclaim the gospel of God.

Now, one does not need to read very far into Romans to find the word **gospel** (εὐαγγέλιον).

- It is used in some form four times in the introduction.
- At other places in this passage and in Paul’s other writings (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–6ff), we can learn what Paul means by gospel.
  - It is the message that salvation from the consequences of sin is possible only by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
    - This understanding is crucial!
    - It is an understanding that we expect from every member of CBC.
    - It is something that we must not only believe; we must be able to clearly articulate it!
  - We will make much more out of this understanding of the gospel as we work more fully through Romans in the weeks and months ahead!

During this sermon, however, I want to consider how Paul’s *exact words* in Rom 1:1 would have hit his original readers. Two emphases are important.

- **First, when the word “gospel” was used in conjunction with the message of a delegate or ambassador in a Roman context in the First Century, it would connote “an official message of world-wide importance.”**<sup>9</sup>
  - It was a good message of “world-changing news.”<sup>10</sup>
  - It was used of someone coming from afar with good news from an important person.
  - As Apostle, God has set apart Paul to announce a good message on behalf of Jesus that is for the whole world!
  - When Roman readers read “gospel,” they think of a herald bringing glad tidings.
  - Fundamentally, that is the gospel!

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<sup>7</sup> See Michael Bird, *Romans*, SOGBC, 19. He writes, “Ironically, the former Pharisee who gloried in his set-apartness from sinners is now God’s messenger to sinners.”

<sup>8</sup> David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–7*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ZECNT, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Sherwood, *Romans*, 95.

- **Second, notice that it is specifically “the gospel of God” to which Paul has been set apart.**
  - Paul’s message is not something that he thought up!
  - The glad tidings that Paul announces come from God.

## **b. His message (2–6)**

That is Paul three-fold identity—“servant of Christ Jesus,” “called apostle”, and “set apart to announce God’s glad tidings.” All this leads Paul to go deeper into the message he proclaims (*the gospel*) in verses 2 through 6. There is a great deal for us to learn about the gospel in the rest of the greeting and more specifically verses 2 through 4!

### **1) His gospel (2–4)**

In these verses, Paul makes two big claims about the gospel that he announces.

- a) The gospel was promised in the Scriptures (2).** <sup>2</sup> *which he promised beforehand through the prophets in the holy Scriptures*

First, the gospel was not only from God it was promised in the OT Scriptures. That is, Paul’s good, world-changing message is not an after-thought! God prepared the way for the gospel by testifying of it beforehand in the Scriptures. **Let’s read verse 2.**

Now, to what does the word “which” refer? It refers back to the gospel in verse 1.

The good news about Jesus that Paul was preaching was not in any way opposed to the OT Scriptures (*as perhaps some Jews might suggest*); instead, the gospel of Jesus—the gospel from God—brings fulfillment and accomplishment to what the prophets of the Old Testament described.

Now, one might wonder where OT prophets promised the “proclamation of good news” from God. Well, let me read a few examples:

- Nahum 1:15 – *Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.*
- Joel 2:32 – *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.*
- Isa 40:9 – *Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”*
- Isa 52:7 – *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*
- Isa 61:1 – *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*

While each of these contexts is different, they all testify to good news of God's deliverance being published among God's people.

- The Isaiah texts, in particular, connect the arrival of this good news with the coming of a Servant.
  - This prophetic book will be central for us as we interpret Romans.
  - Paul cites it more than any other book in Romans!
- Isaiah talks about an anointed Messiah who will accomplish God's purposes on the earth.
  - He will be *pierced* and *crushed* by God as the weight of all our sins meet on Him!
  - That is, the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all so that by His stripes (*his substitutionary death*) we would be healed!

These are just some of the examples of OT prophets who announced a message of future deliverance from God. So, Paul describes the scriptural witness to the gospel in verse 2.

**b) The gospel is about God's Son (3–4).**

But then Paul makes an even bigger claim about the gospel in verses 3 and 4. Not only was the gospel prophetically described in the OT years before Jesus, this gospel proclamation about Jesus also concerns the very Son of God. **Read the first words of verse 3.**

So, the second big claim that Paul makes about the gospel is that it is about God's Son. Doug Moo writes, "The focus of the gospel is a person, God's Son."<sup>11</sup>

Now, more specifically, the gospel concerns two phases of the Son's existence.

- **The first phase begins at the incarnation of the Son of God (3).** <sup>3</sup> *concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh*

Verse 3 speaks of the fact that the eternal, pre-existent, Son of God was born at a point in time into the line of David according to the flesh.

- This verse testifies to the humanity of the Son, connecting Him to the Israelite people through the line of King David.
- The genealogies of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke both demonstrate how Jesus connects to King David and here Paul says that God's Son descends from David in relationship to the flesh.
- That is, when speaking of the humanity of God's Son, one must know that he came out of the line of David.

That leads to another phase of the Son's existence in verse 4. **Read verse 4.**

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 44.

- **The last phase begins at the resurrection of the Son of God (4).** <sup>4</sup> *and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord*

Now, this phase in the Son's existence is a bit more difficult to understand. It starts by describing a time when he "was declared" (ὁρισθέντος) to be something. We have to take things a bit slowly here to grasp what Paul is saying.

- First, the word "declared" could or should be translated "appointed" or "designated."
- Paul says that God appointed or designated the pre-existent and incarnate Son to be something.
- That is when we learn what God appointed the Son to be.
- He *appointed* or *designated* the Son to be: "Son-of-God-in-power."
- That is, Paul describes a new phase of the Son's existence that is marked by power.
- But there is more to learn. How does the Son of God achieve this new powerful state or position?
- Well, this new powerful position came "according to" the "Spirit of holiness" (κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης)—"in relationship to" or "through" the "Holy Spirit."
- This is an emphatic way to refer to how the Holy Spirit enabled the Son of God.
- Whatever this new phase of existence is, it came to the Son as He was in relationship with the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of holiness, the One who brings holiness.
- Now, it's true that the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus all through his earthy ministry, but it seems that Paul has a particular moment of the Spirit's enablement in mind here!
- Now, this might not feel very clear yet, but I think that the next phrase will help bring more clarity.
- Next, we learn of the basis on which God appoints or designates His Son to be "Son-of-God-in-power."
- This new, powerful phase came "by" or "on the basis of" the "resurrection from the dead" (ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν).
- You see, a new level of the Son's existence came when he defeated death and hell through his resurrection from the dead!
- Finally, Paul clearly reveals the true identity of God's Son.
- At the end of the passage, Paul makes it clear that this Son who became flesh but then was appointed "Son-of-God-in-power" at the resurrection is "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν).
- This final statement would not be lost on a Roman audience.
- In their world, people only spoke of Caesar as lord, but Paul shows them in the opening that Jesus Christ *is* God's Son ...

... the enthroned Sovereign Ruler over the world  
... the One who sits next to the Father at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven  
... the One whom we gladly worship for what He's accomplished through his death and resurrection.

That is the gospel! It's the good news that Paul announces that 1) was declared by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures and that 2) concerns God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord!

**2) His calling from Christ (5–6) – <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ**

Today, we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Romans. In this letter, Paul's theological and pastoral purposes pave the way for his missiological appeal. Since he is an apostle to the nations, he desires for the Roman believers to help him reach Spain with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the introduction to the letter, Paul identifies the writer and the recipients.

- We have already considered Paul's identity and his gospel.
- This morning, we will first consider his calling before we look at his brief description of the Roman believers.

Paul starts by unfolding more about the nature of his calling at the beginning of verse 5. **Read it.**

**a) The nature of his calling (5a) – *through whom we have received grace and apostleship***

Paul's gospel was all about Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, he explains that his calling comes through him. In verse 5, one of the more difficult considerations is who Paul is describing when he says "we." It seems better to see this as referring to Paul and those like him who were apostles (*sent delegates*) of Jesus.

We can see this most clearly when we consider the words "grace and apostleship" (χάρις καὶ ἀποστολήν).

- While this might refer to two separate things (e.g., *salvation grace and later apostleship*), it seems more likely that this is a way for Paul to express one concept with two nouns.
- In that case, he would be describing the "grace of apostleship" or the "special gift of being an apostle" that came from Jesus as the calling to apostleship.<sup>12</sup>

So, Paul foundationally understands his calling to apostleship as an unmerited gift from Jesus.

**b) The purpose of his calling (5b) – *to bring about the obedience of faith***

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<sup>12</sup> Moo uses the language "the special gift of being an apostle." See Moo, *Romans*, 51.

That leads to an important statement in the middle of verse 5 that reveals the purpose of his apostleship. **Read it.**

Jesus put a call on Paul's life "for the obedience of faith" (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως) or "to produce" that. That is, Christ's immediate purpose for Paul's apostleship was for this.

Now, it is worth considering what Paul means when he says, "the obedience of faith."

- There are different ways that we can take this.
  - It could be that Paul says that he ministers so that others would demonstrate "obedience to the faith"—the Christian faith, the whole body of beliefs that make up Christianity.
  - It might also be that he means "the obedience that comes from faith" (*genitive of source*) or "the obedience which consists of faith" (*appositional genitive*).<sup>13</sup>
- It seems to me here that Paul reveals that Jesus called him to apostleship to bring about the obedience that genuine faith in Jesus produces.

Having said all this, we might wonder how important this little phrase or concept is. **Are we making too much of it here?**

- Well, to answer this question, we should note that this expression is only found here and in one other place in the entire Bible.
- The other place we find this is in the concluding chapter of Romans.
- In Rom 16:26, Paul prays for God to strengthen the Roman believers in accordance to the revelation that has now been revealed "to bring about the obedience of faith."

It seems then that Paul has this phrase on his mind when he writes Romans and that he uses it to frame the whole letter as bookends. So, if we were to ask Paul "why"—"why did Jesus call you to serve him?" His important answer is: "For the purpose of bringing about obedience that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ."

**c) The focus of his calling (5c) – for the sake of his name**

But that is when we come to an even deeper purpose for Paul's apostleship or the entire focus of his calling. **Let's look at the next phrase in verse 5.**

Paul ministers for the sake of Jesus's name. That is the cause for which he was called. So, question: Why did Paul desire to bring people to the obedience of faith? Answer: For the fame of Jesus. Everything is leading to this for Paul and the whole sentence leads to this. The phrase "for the sake of his name" is the last one in the verse.

- This is the ultimate focus of the verse and of Paul's call to apostleship.
- This end or goal is the most important one for Paul ("For Chesapeake." "For Virginia Beach." → "For His Name.")

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<sup>13</sup> John Stott argues for a genitive of source. Cf. Stott, *Romans*, 52. On the other hand, John Murray, argues for a genitive of apposition. Cf. Murray, *Romans*, 13.

You see, we must understand something. We must understand that every human acts for an end. We all have goals and even an ultimate goal. Now, we might not easily discover what that goal is for others or ourselves, but we all have a chief or ultimate goal in life that guides or controls us.

- *If I would go up to a teacher and ask him or her: “Why?” “Why are you doing this?” Imagine a teacher who could retire but keeps on going. Why do they keep doing this?*
  - *Well, if we were penetrating in our analysis and he or she was truthful in their response, we might hear—“For acceptance.” “For young people.” “For souls.” “For meaning and purpose.”*
- *If we ask a pastor: “Why?” “Why are you doing this?”*
  - *We might hear—“For respect.” “For self-glory.” “For people.” “For spiritual impact on others.”*
- *If we ask a young basketball player: “Why?” Why are you doing all this?”*
  - *We might hear—“For fame.” “For respect.” “For glory.” “For other’s joy.”*

In all cases, however, there is always reasons, ends, goals, and even an ultimate goal.

- “Every human being is driven by some purpose.”<sup>14</sup>
- What distinguishes us from others is the goal for which we strive and/or the degree of commitment and effectiveness we have in reaching that goal.
- The ultimate goal of Paul’s ministry was “for the sake of *His* name” and his degree of commitment and effectiveness in reaching the goal is worthy of emulation!

Now, I want to dig a little deeper into the importance of the fame of God’s name in the scriptures before we push harder on application.

- In Scripture, the “name” of God is *truly* significant.
  - In Leviticus and Numbers, for instance, we learn that God takes it very seriously when someone swears falsely by His name or profanes His name!
  - In Leviticus 24, God says that the Law of Moses required someone to be stoned if they blasphemed the Name!
  - You see, in OT scripture God’s name was to be hallowed and protected.
  - His name *is* significant!
- As a matter of fact, it becomes clear in Scripture that “God’s glory” is the chief goal or end of all creation!
  - In the words of the *Westminster Confession*: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”
  - This is the ultimate “why” question—Why should anything exist at all?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Eckman, “Driven by a Purpose” in *For the Sake of His Name*, 3.

- Consider 1 Cor 10:31 and 1 Pet 4:11b and Jesus's aim in Phil 2:11.
- So, this is the chief end of man!
- But do you know that this is God's chief end or goal as well? In other words, if we were to ask God "why" He created this world, the answer would come back—for His own name and glory.
  - Now, on the surface this is a pretty bold (*and perhaps disheartening or confusing*) claim.
    - You should not accept this just because I say it or because some other theological says it! Instead, you should ask: "Upon what biblical basis do you say this?"
      - Well, this is found in *many* scriptural passages.
        - For instance, consider the voice of these biblical authors ...
 

David in Psalm 23:3 – He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness *for his name's sake*.

Asaph in Psalm 79:9 – Help us, O God of our salvation, *for the glory of your name*; deliver us, and atone for our sins, *for your name's sake*.

Samuel in 1 Sam 12:22 – For the LORD will not forsake his people, *for his great name's sake*, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself.

Moses in Numbers 14 – Here Moses appeals for God not to wipe out disobedient Israel because of the effect it will have on the nations' perception of his glory. **Read verses 11–35.**
- But how could it be right or loving of God to make His own name so important? This past week, my wife and I learned of a young woman who is now rejecting God! She was a close friend of our family, but now she questions the existence and character of God. She wonders how God could punish innocent men, women, and children and be so concerned for his own glory!
- Well, to answer:
  - ***First, she needs to know that human beings have no rights or claims over against God.***
    - Foundationally, her view of two things is off—God and human sin.
      - God is absolutely sovereign—the true and deserving King of all created beings and things.

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<sup>15</sup> For a great discussion of this question in Jonathan Edward's theology, consider Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 207–23.

- As Sovereign, He is infinite in holiness and perfections.
  - That is, he is infinitely beautiful in all his perfections.
  - As a matter of fact, believers will experience fuller and fuller enjoyment and discovery of his infinite perfections in heaven. *We will never come to an end in our discovery of the infinite ways He is holy and perfect.*
  - So, all condemnation that comes from God is just.
  - If you do not get this, then you do not get God and you do not get sin.
- This is why the first three chapters of Romans were written by the way—to help us understand that there is no innocent man, woman, boy, girl, or even baby.
- ***Second, our friend also needs to know that God being “for God” is right and loving.***
  - ***If God knows that the chief end of all things is His own glory, then it would be wrong, dubious, or fraudulent, for Him not to pursue this same goal—the highest and most worthy goal.***
    - If this is the right goal for all things, then it would be wrong for God to pursue anything else as His chief goal.
    - “God, no less than human beings, is under a kind of ethical constraint to take into account the *inherent* worth of every entity.”<sup>16</sup>
    - After evaluation then, the heaviest, weightiest, noblest end is His own infinitely perfect and holy Self.
    - God must have highest regard for that which is most worthy!
    - You see, God must be God-centered to be God.
  - This past week, our governmental leaders evaluated the significance of possible harm to human life and aquatic life and made a decision over the coast of South Carolina.
  - They shot down a Chinese surveillance balloon over water because they thought it better to possibly harm fish than humans.
  - That is our assessment of worth!
  - That is an assessment that most (*sane!*) people would not argue against!
  - Well, it is not wrong for God to pursue His own name when compared to all the lesser goals around!
  - As a matter of fact, it is a necessary commitment of all things and all beings!
- ***Second, if God knows that the only way for someone to be delivered from their sins is through His name, then it is loving for him to make much out of this!***
  - If salvation only comes through his name, then it would be unloving for Him not to make much out of his own name.

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<sup>16</sup> McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 211.

- God must be God-centered to be loving!
- God making much out of Himself and desiring the best for me are the same things because the best will only come through His name!
- So, God, promote it, plug it, advocate for it, pursue it!
- Your name is the highest goal and men and women will only be saved on its basis.

So, this is the chief purpose of all beings and all things, and it was the ultimate goal of Paul's apostleship—for the sake of His name!

Now, men and women, this is important stuff!

- Some of you may have never heard this before!
  - Maybe you are a new believer or a young person.
  - It is so important that you get this!
- Some of you may have heard this before even several times, but are you living this way?

Might I use the stirring words of two great theologians and their view these things to implore you to consider this personally?

- First, let's consider how John Stott describes things:

"We should be 'jealous' (as Scripture sometimes puts it) for the honor of his name—troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it should be given the honor and glory which are due to it. The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (*important as that is*), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (*strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18*), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup>

- Second, John Piper:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship does not. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever."<sup>18</sup>

Men and women, God's vision and chief end for all things is His own name. "And if we do not join God in advancing his aim for the universe, then [frankly] we waste our lives and oppose our Creator."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> John Piper, "A God-Entranced Vision of All Things," in *The God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 24.

- d) **The range of his calling (5d–6)** – *among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

So, we have seen the nature of his calling and the purpose and focus of it. That leaves us only to consider one last quality of it—the range of his calling. That is how I take the end of verse 5 and all of verse 6. **Read it.**

- **The range of Paul’s apostleship includes Gentiles everywhere.**
  - Paul says that it is among “all” the nations.
  - He strongly feels Christ’s admonition to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”
- **But the range of Paul’s apostleship also includes the Roman believers.**
  - He says, “Including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”
  - Although Paul had never been to Rome and had no part in planting these churches, he understands his calling as an authoritative delegate of Jesus to the Gentiles to include these Roman believers.
  - Jesus called him to this task, so the Romans must listen to his message and be reconciled to help him reach others for Christ!

So, that is Paul—his identity, his gospel, and his calling. That leaves then the recipients—the Roman believers. **Look with me at verse 7 for what he says about them.**

2. **Roman believers (7)** – *to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul understands them as those whom God has loved and called to be saints. Now, if we were to keep reading in this introduction to Romans, we would find out that many of the believers in the churches of Rome were Gentiles. So, Paul’s statement here represents an amazing shift in perspective for him.

- Twenty years before this, Paul would never say this about Gentiles—loved and called by God our Father.
- Then, he would feel that Gentiles were fuel for the fires of hell!
  - They were subject to God’s great wrath and displeasure because of their idolatry, immorality, and uncleanness.
- But something changed Paul’s perspective. **What was it?**
  - It was the gospel.
  - Now, they are no longer enemies of God but loved by him.
  - Further, they, like Paul himself (1:1) are called by God to be holy.
    - The word “called” (κλητοῖς) is twice mentioned here for emphasis!
    - This is something that we should be amazed at.
    - This is entirely God’s initiative.
    - He called out some of the Roman Gentiles to be made holy!
    - We will learn more about this calling in future sermons!

To these loved and called believers, Paul says, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

## B. Opening thanksgiving: uncovering the obligations of the gospel (1:8–15)

In Paul’s introduction to the Romans, he has a lot to say about himself and the Romans. Technically, the introduction has three parts. There is an 1) opening greeting (1–7), 2) opening thanksgiving (8–15), and 3) opening thesis (16–17). In the greeting, Paul uncovers the nature of the gospel.

Now, we consider his opening thanksgiving where Paul describes some of the obligations that he feels towards others because of the gospel. If you look at the opening words of verse 14, you can see this clearly. Paul says, “I am under obligation ...”

In our study of Paul’s opening thanksgiving, we will consider four obligations that Paul feels that relate to two relationships. So, we will consider “debt” today! This is the good sort of debt that every believer should feel!

### 1. **Obligation to God (8)** – <sup>8</sup> *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*

First, we consider his obligation to God. **Look with me at verse 8.**

**To whom was Paul thankful?** Well, Paul says, “my God.” The main verb of this section is the word “thank” (εὐχαριστῶ). The subject is Paul, and his object is God (θεός).

- Now, why does Paul thank God?
- Why not thank them?
- Well, because he knows that their faith was a gift of God.
- Consider a parallel passage later in Romans (*Rom 6:17*):

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

Paul understood salvation as a gift from God! Eph 2:8–9 explain it well:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Paul was obligated to thank God not to boast in the Romans for what He had done! God is the one who gives people faith! Listen carefully to another text—Gal 2:9,

*When James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me.*

Paul’s apostleship was also given to him. It came from God! That is true of any grace that *anyone* perceives in us!

Before we move along, however, let’s consider two last questions:

- **First, for whom is Paul thankful in verse 8?** He is thankful “for all” the Roman believers.

- **Second, why is he thankful?** He is thankful “because of their faith” that is proclaimed all around the world. Paul knew how the existence of a growing community of believers in the world’s greatest city was encouraging to other believers.<sup>20</sup>

So, Paul is obligated to God for what He has done in creating a believing community in Rome. This is how we should speak to others. “I am so thankful for what I see God doing in you and through you! We owe God thanks.

## 2. Obligation to fellow Christians (9–15)

Next, we consider the obligation that Paul felt toward his fellow Christians in Rome. More specifically, Paul reveals three outstanding characteristics of his obligation to the Roman believers in verses 9–13—1) prayer, 2) presence, and 3) proclamation. Paul really wants the Romans to know that 1) he prays for them a lot, that 2) he really wants to see them, and 3) that he cannot wait to see what the gospel will do among them.

- a. **It includes prayers (9–10a).** <sup>9</sup> *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you* <sup>10</sup> *always in my prayers.*

We will consider first his obligation to prayer. **Look with me at verses 9–10a.**

In verse 9, Paul gives evidence of the thanksgiving that he gives to God by calling God to the witness stand—“For God is my witness.”

- These are not light words for Paul to use.
- He is using court room imagery here when he calls God to the witness stand to verify what only He could verify.
- Since Paul is speaking of private prayers to God, there is only one true witness who can confirm the nature of his prayers—God.

**But what is Paul calling God to witness about?** The answer is prayer—his intercessory prayer for the Roman believers. The text says, “That without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers.”

Now, I want to consider two further things about what Paul calls God to witness for him.

- **First, let’s consider the regularity with which Paul prays for the Roman believers.**
  - Paul says that he prays “without ceasing” (ἀδιαλείπτως) for them.
  - This means that every time Paul prays, he mentions them.
  - This language is used in Greek literature to describe the irritation of a cough.
  - When someone is sick, the urge to cough can be overwhelming.
  - It keeps coming up time and time again, often without any ability to stifle it.
  - So, every time Paul prays, he mentions them.
- **But, secondly, let’s consider the range of Paul’s intercessory prayers.**

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<sup>20</sup> Consider what Thielman says, “Paul is thankful to God for the encouragement that the very existence of a faithful Christian community in Rome is to a vast number of Christians in other places.” Thielmann, *Romans*, 75.

- What is significant here is the reminder that Paul had never even met many of the Roman believers.
- While he mentions some of them in the final chapter, he does not have a personal relationship with most of them—likely hundreds or thousands of believers that he’s never met before.
- These are not believers in Paul’s own assembly or his community group, these are people he has never met before and who are separated from him by hundreds of miles.
- I love what D.A. Carson writes about the Paul prays here. He declares that praying like Paul “is a critical discipline that will enlarge our horizons, increase our ministry, and help us become world Christians.”<sup>21</sup>
  - Do you pray like this?
  - Are you a world Christian?
  - Perhaps, you have never considered the value of it!
  - If you took the prayer booklet that Pastor Dan has created, then you would be praying for believers in Richmond, VA, Logan, UT, Colorado City, AZ, and Beckley, WV. You would be praying for believers trying to reach Slavic people in the Hampton Roads. You would be praying for believers in Argentina, Brazil, Spain, France, India, the Philippines, and Central Asia.

So, Paul’s intercessory prayers for believers go well beyond his immediate sphere of influence.

- b. It involves his physical presence (10b–13).** *Asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

But when we look more closely at the subject of his prayer and continue reading in the passage, we can see a second part of the obligation that Paul felt toward the Roman believers. I call it “presence.” Paul really wanted to minister among the Romans in the near future. **Let’s read verses 10b–13.**

So, Paul really wanted to make it to Rome. Now, the question that really drives verses 11–13 is why. Why does he want to see them? Well, Paul longed (v.11) for this for three good reasons.

- **First, his presence would benefit the Roman believers spiritually (v. 11).**
    - Paul prayed that he might “impart some spiritual gift” to them. What is this?
      - This might mean that Paul wanted to bestow upon them a spiritual gift (i.e., *a miraculous endowment, spiritual gift*).
      - But does Paul really think that he will be handing out spiritual gifts when he gets there?
- “I have healing for you, teaching for you, tongues for you, prophecy for you.”

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<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 98.

- Well, this is highly unlikely, however, because in other passages, Paul sees the Holy Spirit as the One who gives gifts to believers.

1 Cor 12:8–11 says, “For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

- Instead, Paul simply desires to benefit them spiritually—to make the significant spiritual impact that comes through the use of his gifts.
  - But how does that make you feel?
  - How would we respond if a travelling preacher wrote us to say that he longs to come among us so that we would experience that spiritual gift—the spiritual gift that comes through his presence?
  - Well, that sets us up for the second reason Paul longs to come to Rome. It’s found in verse 12.

- **So, second, Paul’s presence would bring about *mutual edification* (v. 12).**

- It might sound arrogant for Paul to speak of his personal benefits to the churches of Rome; so, he clarifies or qualifies the idea.
- He says that he too would be edified by interaction with them.
  - You might think, “***What could new believers offer an apostle?***”
  - But the Spirit leads Paul to include this *so that* it’s clear that the distinctive perspectives and gifts of every believer can produce mutual strengthening or encouragement in the body of Christ.

- **Third, his presence would increase his spiritual harvest (v. 13).**

That leads to one final reason Paul longs to be with the Roman believers. It is found in verse 13.  
***Let’s read it.***

Paul wants the Romans to know that it’s been his longstanding intention to come to them so *that* he might reap some spiritual fruit there. This can speak of the fruit of new converts in Rome and/or fruits related to spiritual growth in believers there. He knew that being present in Rome would mean fruit for him there.

**c. It involves proclaiming the gospel (14–15).** <sup>14</sup> *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.* <sup>15</sup> *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

So, Paul felt an obligation to God (*thanksgiving*) and to the Roman believers (*prayer, physical presence*). Finally, we will see one more obligation that he feels toward believers—the obligation to proclaim the gospel (14–15). ***Read verses 14 and 15.***

The word “obligation” (ὀφειλέτης) in the original is sometimes translated “a debtor.” Paul says, “I am a debtor.” Now, I want to consider two important things about the debt that Paul feels in this passage.

- **First, notice, to whom Paul feels indebted.**
  - Paul's way of revealing this is hard for us to understand.
  - He says that he was under obligation to both "Greeks and Barbarians" ("Ἕλλησὶν τε καὶ βαρβάρους) and both to "the wise and the foolish" (σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις).
    - The classification "Greeks" is perhaps easiest to understand. This refers not only to those who spoke Greek but those who embraced and promoted Greek culture.
    - "Barbarians" is more difficult.
      - Foundationally, this word is "onomatopoeic."<sup>22</sup>
      - That is, it is a word that sounds like what it means.
      - When a Greek person heard someone speak in a different language, it would sound like—"bar, bar, bar..."
      - A Barbarian would then be non-Greek speaking people.
      - Some Gentiles spoke Greek, and some did not.
      - In those 2 categories were every person on the planet!
      - So, Paul was a debtor to all Gentiles.
- **Second, consider, how Paul is indebted to all Gentiles.** Have you ever asked yourself: How did Paul get in debt to all these people?
  - John Stott helps here.
    - He says, "There are in fact two possible ways of getting into debt. The first is to borrow money *from* someone; the second is to be given money *for* someone by a third party."<sup>23</sup>
      - OPTION 1: If I were to loan you \$100, you would be a debtor to me for \$100.
      - OPTION 2: If I were to ask you to deliver \$100 to someone and you agreed, you would be a debtor to them until you delivered it.
    - It is this second option, that better describes what Paul feels. He is a debtor to all Gentiles because God gave him something to give them.
    - And, men and women, this is debt that all believers are under as well.
  - This is the deep, missionary obligation that Paul felt as a servant of Jesus Christ.

The word "eager" (πρόθυμον) is used only two other times in the entire NT (*Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38*). This word speaks of a readiness or a willingness that arises from the obligation or debt that Paul felt. More specifically, Paul is ready to preach the gospel—to announce the good news that he brings from God.

Now, one last significant observation must be made about the text of Rom 1:15. To whom was Paul ready to preach the gospel?

- Well, Paul says, "To you who are in Rome."

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas Moo was the first to draw my attention to the fact that the word was onomatopoeic. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> John Stott, *Romans*, 59.

- Now, this might be Paul’s way of talking about the citizens or inhabitants of Rome and his desire to evangelize them, but it seems better to understand “to you” as referring to the believers in Rome to whom he writes this letter.
- You see, Paul wants to preach the gospel to the believers in Rome.

**Now, why would we want to do this?** Well, I have two thoughts here.

- First, the gospel goes far deeper than what we’re normally able to understand when we first believed.
  - James Montgomery Boice gives the following illustration about the magnificent splendors of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

*One local farmer [from Luxor, Egypt] tried to find a solid foundation for his home and scratched about in the sand to find some bedrock on which to build. In time he came upon a smooth surface, and he erected his home there. In the desert where the wind is constantly blowing and where the sand shifts according to the air currents, anything permanent will cause the sand to shift away from it. As the sand drifted away from his cottage the farmer discovered that his house was actually built on a piece of hand-carved stone, presumably from an ancient temple. It was only after the excavations had begun that the farmer realized that the stone was a standing column, and after the excavations were completed he found that his home was nearly eighty feet above ground level. There is a parallel here to some people’s understanding of the [gospel of the] Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>*

- The gospel is far more magnificent than we perhaps ever understand. The foundation of our salvation is far greater and deeper than we might ever even know in this life!
- Second, the gospel’s implications extend to every area of life.
  - There is a sense in which every Christian blessing and virtue is tied in some way to the gospel.
  - Andy Naselli writes, “The gospel is not simply for converting non-Christians; the gospel—especially as Paul unpacks it in this letter—is for building up Christians.”<sup>25</sup>

### **C. Opening thesis: exposing the power of the gospel (1:16–17)**

In the final part of the introduction, Paul clearly states his thesis for the entire letter. Paul puts forward this premise and then explains and proves and defends this thesis about the gospel throughout Romans 1–11 before calling the Romans to obey it (Rom 12–15) and help him take it in the West (Rom 15).

Fundamentally, his thesis is that the gospel is God’s power for salvation for everyone who believes. Now, Paul unfolds this thesis in verses 16 and 17 through a “continuous and progressive unfolding of reasons,”<sup>26</sup> each marked out by the word “for” (γάρ).

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<sup>24</sup> Boice, *Philippians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 114–15.

<sup>25</sup> Andy Naselli, *Romans*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 26.

**Look with me at the three occurrences of “for” in verses 16 and 17.** Each of these words begins a new answer to three “why” questions:

- 1) Why is Paul ready to preach the gospel in Rome?
- 2) Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel?
- 3) Why is the gospel the power of God?<sup>27</sup>

In our sermon today, we will consider how Paul answers these 3 questions *and*, in the process, expose the power of the gospel of God. In doing so, it is my hope that God will give us new strength to deal with one of our oldest and most challenging failures. This failure has plagued the church from the very beginning, starting with the infamous failures of Simon Peter and John Mark. It’s the failure of being ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

- In this sermon, we will put the spotlight on this failure, but we will not hammer with the anvil of guilt and manipulation.
- Instead, it is my hope that we will leave with zeal to proclaim this gospel in our streets and neighborhoods by examining Paul’s deep and joyous confidences in it.
  - May what he had—what he believed—work like a magnet for our souls today, drawing us in, igniting in our whole being a zeal for God’s gospel and His name today!

So, let’s begin with the three why questions that expose the commitment in Paul’s heart for the gospel of Christ.

### **1. Why is Paul ready to preach the gospel in Rome (1:16a)? <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel.**

In verse 15, Paul stated that he is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, and then, he gives us the reason why he is eager to preach the gospel in verse 16. **Read verse 16a.**

Paul is ready to preach the gospel in Rome because he is not “ashamed” (ἐπαισχύνομαι) of it. He says, “I am not ashamed.”

- These are four easy words to say or to claim but hard to practice.
- Here Paul deals with a temptation that every Christian experiences.
- Every Christian will, at times, be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel.

But why is that the case? Let me give you two reasons.

- **Well, sometimes, it is because we are standing before significant or important people.**
  - Paul had proclaimed the gospel in various towns and cities throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia, but now he is talking about Rome.

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<sup>27</sup> Two authors succinctly demonstrate this view of the structure of the passage. First, Charles Erdman writes, “Paul desires to preach in Rome ‘for’ he is not ashamed of the gospel; and he is not ashamed of the gospel ‘for’ it is ‘the power of God;’ and it is the power of God ‘for’ it reveals ‘a righteousness of God’ which is ‘from faith to faith.’” Charles Erdman, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 28. Second, John Murray also explains it well. He writes, “The apostle tells us first why he is ready to preach the gospel at Rome—he is not ashamed of the gospel. Then he tells us why he is not ashamed of the gospel—it is ‘the power of God unto salvation.’ And then, finally, he tells us why it is the power of God unto salvation—therein the ‘righteousness of God is revealed.’” Murray, *Romans*, 26.

- Rome was the leading city of the world—the most significant and important city in the world—yet he *was* eager to see what the gospel could do there as well. He knew that it could work with any people.
- **Other times, we are ashamed of the gospel because its message is highly confrontational.** Sometimes, we are afraid to proclaim the good news because it starts by establishing that the people we want to reach are condemned by sin, certain to experience hell, and under God’s wrath. We are like the doctor who is given the assignment to tell someone that they have a serious, terminal disease that will kill them.

But Paul is ready to fulfill his debt to all Gentiles in Rome because “he is not ashamed.”

**2. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel (1:16b)?** *For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

But that leads us to another question: Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel? This question is answered in the second half of verse 16. **Read verse 16b.**

Simply stated, Paul is not ashamed of the gospel *because* he knows that it contains Divine power. But let’s meditate slowly on what this means.

Let me make three statements here:

**a. The gospel is God’s power.**

First, the gospel is described as the “power of God” (δύναμις θεοῦ).

- The word for “power” is the Greek word δύναμις.
- Although this word sounds like dynamite, drawing that parallel is not appropriate.
- It is anachronistic, reading something modern back into the meaning of an ancient text.
- Further, this is not the dynamite of God *because* dynamite is rarely constructive.
- It is normally destructive!
- This power, however, normally speaks of effective energy.

So, when Paul uses the word “power” of the gospel, he is talking about its ability to do something not destroy something. The gospel is effective power.

Now, more specifically, the gospel is God’s ability to do something!

- This is the ability of the One and only supreme and almighty God.
- This is “the power that belongs to God”—that emanates directly from Him.<sup>28</sup>

No wonder Paul was not ashamed! He knew that it would not let him down!

**b. The gospel brings salvation.**

But we continue. Paul knew that the gospel was God’s power to do something, but he gets more specific than this!

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<sup>28</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 27.

In verse 16, we learn that it leads to or accomplishes “salvation” (σωτηρίαν).

- Now, when Paul uses this word in Romans and its related verb (“to save”),<sup>29</sup> he is primarily speaking of the rescue or deliverance of God’s people from the consequences of sin.
- That is what salvation is!
- Salvation is deliverance from God’s present and eternal wrath against sin.
  - A few verses later, in Rom 1:18, we see that God’s wrath—His holy anger—is turned “against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”
  - And then, still later, that sinners are “storing up wrath for [themselves] on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (2:5).
  - And, men and women, being under God’s wrath is the worst possible fate that anyone could ever experience!
- Yet, the gospel is God’s power to rescue us.
- “[The gospel] can do everything [our] human souls need for [now] and eternity.”<sup>30</sup>
  - And, men and women, there is only one way to be saved!
  - Acts 4:12 says, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
  - The gospel of Jesus is the only way that God saves.

**c. The gospel saves everyone who believes.**

No wonder Paul wasn’t ashamed—the gospel is uniquely *God’s saving* power! And this is true “for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Now, this is important!

- The way God’s powerful gospel saves us is through faith (by believing, by putting full trust) in it.
  - There is no discrimination for Jews or Gentiles.
  - No one is excluded by nature of the sufficiency of the gospel.
  - Any person who puts his or her trust in God’s gospel will be saved.
  - We can say with confidence to anyone we proclaim the gospel: “It does not matter where you come from, if you believe this, you will be delivered.”

No wonder why Paul wasn’t ashamed! He was ready to proclaim the gospel in Rome because it could save “everyone who believes” (παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι) in the city.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In Romans, Paul uses σωτηρία five times (1:16; 10:1, 10, 11; 13:11) and σῶζω 8 times (5:9, 10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26).

<sup>30</sup> Erdman, *An Exposition*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Davey points out some significant things about this phrase. He writes, “Paul strategically uses the phrase ‘everyone who believes’ five times in Romans (1:16; 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11), and he probably copied it from Jesus’ teaching (e.g., John 3:15–16).” Davey, *Romans*, 7.

**3. Why is the *gospel* God’s power (1:17)?** <sup>17</sup> *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

But we have one more question to answer. Why is the gospel God’s saving power? To answer this, we look to verse 17. **Read it.**

The gospel is *God’s* power for salvation *because it* unveils “the righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ).

- Now, this little phrase introduces what might be the single most important topic in the whole book!

To understand such an important subject, we will now consider three questions about God’s righteousness.

**a. What is the “righteousness of God”?**

So, we start with the important question: “What is the righteousness of God?” It might sound like a simple question until you are the one who is asked to define or describe it. Romans, however, is a great place to begin.

- “Romans contains the highest concentration of righteousness language in the Pauline corpus.”<sup>32</sup>
- Righteousness words are used in various forms 56 times in the book of Romans (δικαιοσύνη–noun–34x’s, δίκαιος–adj.–7x’s, δικαίω–verb–15x’s). This is well over half of the occurrences in the Pauline Epistles.
- The phrase “the righteousness of God” or its near equivalent is found eight times in Romans and in only one other place in Paul’s writings (2 Cor 5:21).<sup>33</sup>

When one speaks of the “righteousness of God,” foundationally he is describing who God is—a part of his being. Fundamentally, God is right and just. He is inherently and perfectly just. In a sense, this is God’s righteousness. Further, he has utmost integrity in his judgments because he is always right and just. He is always right in being and in judgment. This is *his inherent* righteousness.

**b. How does God display His righteousness in the OT?**

But that leads us to another question that springs directly from Rom 1:17. In that verse, Paul talks about God’s righteousness being “revealed” (ἀποκαλύπτεται). So, how does God display His righteousness?

- Now, to answer this question, I think it is important to go where Paul would go.
- How would Paul answer this?
- Paul’s understanding of God’s righteousness came from his Bible—the OT.
- Now, when we go to the OT to discover more about “righteousness” we come to almost 1,300 occurrences.

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<sup>32</sup> Thielmann, *Romans*, 84.

<sup>33</sup> Rom 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3 (2x).

- We cannot look at all these passages, but we will consider several that not only describe God's righteousness, but that also answer our specific question here: **How does God display or reveal his justness to humanity?**

That is when we come across two strands of biblical evidence.

## 1) God reveals his justness ... through judgment—he righteously judges sinners.

First, one of the ways that God reveals or displays His justness is through judgment. That is, as God righteously judges and condemns sinners, his righteousness is revealed. Since this is how most of us probably perceive God's righteousness, we will only consider a few texts!

- Psa 7:11–17 – <sup>11</sup> *God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.* <sup>12</sup> *If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow;* <sup>13</sup> *he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.* <sup>14</sup> *Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.* <sup>15</sup> *He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made.* <sup>16</sup> *His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.* <sup>17</sup> *I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.* <sup>34</sup>
- Psa 9:5–8 – <sup>5</sup> *You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever.* <sup>6</sup> *The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.* <sup>7</sup> *But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice,* <sup>8</sup> *and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.* <sup>35</sup>
- 1 Sam 2:10 – <sup>10</sup> *The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.* <sup>36</sup>

So, God demonstrates His righteousness through punishing and condemning sinners. **But how is that good news for us?** The only way this is good for us is that we can be confident that we have a judge who will always get it right! We want a judge like that! But there is a problem for us about this! Our problem is that we are all guilty! This is bad news for us because we are all sinners.

## 2) God reveals his justness ... through salvation—he “justly justifies the unjust.”<sup>37</sup>

That understanding of how God reveals his righteousness, however, only captures one nuance of OT truth. Another strand of Biblical texts points to a second way that God reveals His

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<sup>34</sup> Notes on Psa 7: David says that God is a righteous judge and a God that feels indignation every day. God sharpens his sword and has his bow bent to launch fiery arrows at the sinner. This passage talks about God bringing down righteous wrath against sinners. This is revelation of His righteousness. When the psalmist considers the judgment of the wicked, he knows he should praise God for his righteousness.

<sup>35</sup> Notes on Psa 9: David speaks both of God's judgment on sinners and his ruling in righteous justice. Bringing forth justice and judgment are equivalent in this passage.

<sup>36</sup> Notes on 1 Sam 2: In the final verse of Hannah's song or prayer to God, she speaks of the Lord breaking in pieces and thundering from heaven and bringing righteous judgment on the ends of the earth.

<sup>37</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 37.

righteousness. The other way that God reveals his righteousness is through saving us. There are some OT texts that correlate “saving” or “rescuing” with “righteousness.”

Let’s consider a few of these:

- Psa 51:3–14 – <sup>3</sup> *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.* <sup>4</sup> *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.* <sup>5</sup> *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* <sup>6</sup> *Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.* <sup>7</sup> *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* <sup>8</sup> *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.* <sup>9</sup> *Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.* <sup>10</sup> *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* <sup>11</sup> *Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.* <sup>12</sup> *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.* <sup>13</sup> *Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.* <sup>14</sup> *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*<sup>38</sup>
- Psa 71:1–3, 12–15, 19 – <sup>1</sup> *In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame!* <sup>2</sup> *In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!* <sup>3</sup> *Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.* <sup>12</sup> *O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!* <sup>13</sup> *May my accusers be put to shame and consumed; with scorn and disgrace may they be covered who seek my hurt.* <sup>14</sup> *But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more.* <sup>15</sup> *My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day for their number is past my knowledge.* <sup>19</sup> *Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?*<sup>39</sup>
- Psa 98:1–3, 7–9 – <sup>1</sup> *Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.* <sup>2</sup> *The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.* <sup>3</sup> *He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.* <sup>7</sup> *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!* <sup>8</sup> *Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together* <sup>9</sup> *before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*<sup>40</sup>
- Isa 46:13 – <sup>13</sup> *I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.*<sup>41</sup>
- Isa 51:4–8 – <sup>4</sup> *Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.* <sup>5</sup> *My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope*

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<sup>38</sup> Notes on Psa 51: God had just delivered words of judgment on David because of his sin. David declares that God is just/right in this judgment and in the words that He issues against David (9), but David asks for deliverance from his own sin and says that if God delivers him that he will tell everyone about God’s righteousness. If, however, God’s righteousness is solely His character and His just dealings with sinners, why would David tell everyone about that and how could he expect any relief from the consequences of sin?

<sup>39</sup> Notes on Psa 71: The psalmist connects God’s righteousness and his rescue or deliverance.

<sup>40</sup> Notes on Psa 98: Here as well righteousness is equated with salvation. The psalmist connects God’s acts of salvation with his revelation of His righteousness. Yet, later, in the text (v. 9), his judgment comes with righteousness.

<sup>41</sup> Notes on Isa 46: The text equates salvation with righteousness.

for me, and for my arm they wait. <sup>6</sup> Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. <sup>7</sup> Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. <sup>8</sup> For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool, but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations.”<sup>42</sup>

- **Dan 9:4–10; 16–19** – <sup>4</sup> I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules, <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. <sup>7</sup> To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. <sup>8</sup> To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup> To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him <sup>10</sup> and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. <sup>16</sup> O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let you anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. <sup>17</sup> Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. <sup>18</sup> O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our plea before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. <sup>19</sup> O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”<sup>43</sup>

So, the righteousness of God is on display when he punishes sinners but also when he saves people. The OT portrays a multi-faceted view of God’s righteousness that includes 1) who He is *and* 2) what He does in judgment. This includes His just judgment on sin and his salvation.

### c. How can God justify delivering sinners?

That, however, leads us to one last question about God’s righteousness being displayed—How? How could both be true? How can judge one guilty sinner and rescue another? How can God justify rescuing any guilty sinner?

Well, I would like to answer this question first from the OT and then from Romans.

#### 1) In the OT, it is “through a Righteous Servant” (Isa 53).

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<sup>42</sup> Notes on Isa 51: God’s righteousness is another way of speaking of his salvation.

<sup>43</sup> Notes on Dan 9: In this prayer, Daniel says that God owns righteousness, but we own shame. Daniel declares that God is righteous in his judgment and for all that He does to his people. But, in verse 17, Daniel appeals for God to turn away from His wrath and present mercy for the sake of His own name.

Consider Isa 53:3–6, 11: In this passage, Isaiah describes how God’s righteous Servant will make it possible for God to justly deliver unjust people.

*<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

Isaiah says that God will bring down his wrath upon this Righteous Servant with the result being that many will be accounted righteous because of him.

## **2) In Romans, it is “through faith in the Gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:17).**

And this leads us back to Romans 1 and 3. When we come to the NT, we have a different word to explain how God can justly justify sinners through the sacrifice of the Righteous one.

- That word is “gospel.”
- It is through the gospel of Jesus Christ that God can righteously save sinners.
- In this way, God displays His righteousness by saving people through the gospel.
- The gospel reveals God’s righteousness in judgment and salvation.
- He is right to judge and condemn and because of the gospel He remains right to save through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

Now, the final point that Paul makes in verse 17 is *how* God reveals His righteousness in the gospel. He does so “from faith to faith.”

- Now, there are about 27 different ways scholars have explained this!
- I think that Paul is saying that this gift of saving righteousness comes “altogether by faith”<sup>44</sup> or more specifically from “Christ’s faith (faithfulness) to our faith.”<sup>45</sup>
- This is why the NIV translates it “faith from first to last.”

He then concludes by quoting an OT text (Hab 2:4) that shows this is always how it has been.<sup>46</sup> Paul feels this text establishes a general maxim that is true for both the OT and NT eras: Righteous people will live (*eternally*) by faith (*their own faith*). The OT confirms that personal faith gives life.

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<sup>44</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> I need to do more work on the phrase “from faith to faith” and how this relates to the gospel revealing God’s righteousness. Question: How does the gospel reveal God’s righteousness? Answer: “From faith to faith.” What does Paul mean by this?

<sup>46</sup> There are many interpretive challenges for this quotation from Habakkuk in that Paul’s quotation does not agree exactly with either the MT version or the LXX one. The main challenges are that Paul eliminates the pronouns found in either of these versions (i.e., my faith/faithfulness or his faithfulness) and whether this speaks of “faith” or “faithfulness” in the OT and Pauline texts. Schreiner suggests, however, that whether faith and human faithfulness are inseparably bound together. He says, “In addition, a canonical reading of Habakkuk itself suggests that faithfulness and faith are inseparable. . . . Those who

Today, we have considered why Paul was ready and not ashamed of the gospel and we have learned from Paul's deep conviction of soul! He loves the gospel because it is God's saving power for everyone who believes! How could he not tell everyone about that?

This week I heard an elderly preacher reflect on the words of an old song. I appreciate this preacher for his evangelistic zeal and commitments. The song was "I Love to Tell the Story." Consider some of these words:

*1. I love to tell the story  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory,  
Of Jesus and his love.  
I love to tell the story,  
Because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings  
As nothing else can do.*

*3. I love to tell the story;  
'Tis pleasant to repeat  
What seems, each time I tell it,  
More wonderfully sweet.  
I love to tell the story,  
For some have never heard  
The message of salvation  
From God's own holy Word.*

*4. I love to tell the story,  
For those who know it best  
Seem hungering and thirsting  
To hear it like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory,  
I sing the new, new song,  
'Twill be the old, old story  
That I have loved so long.*

May this be true of us! May we go to our streets and neighborhoods and places of employment and schools with the gospel of God's saving righteousness in His righteous Servant, Jesus.

## **II. The Theological Issue: You must understand the gospel (1:18–11:36).**

After the introduction to the letter, Paul expresses his main theological idea. That is, Paul fully describes the gospel, giving its nature, power, and history in Romans 1–11 so that believers can grasp it more fully.

### **A. Its nature: It reveals the righteousness of God (1:18–4:25)**

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would live would do so by their faithfulness to the covenant. But this faithfulness to the covenant is rooted in faith, as the conclusion of the book indicates." Schreiner, *Romans*, 75. Glenn Davies also suggests that neither idea can be renounced as a possible meaning for this phrase. He writes, "It is therefore best to understand a primary reference to the righteous who live by faith, with a secondary reference to the fact that they are also righteous by faith." Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans 1–4*, 41.

If you look at the first word of verse 18 (“for”), you can see that Paul is going to expound more fully on the point that he just made about the gospel and God’s righteousness in verses 16 and 17: *The gospel is God’s saving power for everyone who believes because in it God’s righteousness/justness is revealed through the sacrifice of His Son*. Since God’s righteousness involves “his fairness and impartiality, it is essential for Paul to show that God’s wrath toward the unrighteousness of human beings is fair.”<sup>47</sup>

In this section, God gives us the reason why God’s saving righteousness is necessary. It is necessary because His wrath is already being revealed against all human unrighteousness.

In these verses, we will learn why salvation through the gospel is necessary. It is because God’s wrath is being revealed against human sinfulness.

## **1. A righteousness against all ungodliness (1:18–3:20)**

The picture that is given here is not flattering. In Rom 1:28–3:20, he’ll describe the unrighteousness and ungodliness of all people. He starts with Gentiles (1:18–32), moves to Jews (2:1–3:8), before summarizing the condemnation of all people (3:9–20).

As a college aged, young person, I worked summers for Allied Van Lines. I remember going to a Truck-stop hotel one day. When I turned on the lights in our room, things scattered and scurried. It was alarming!

In this section, Paul exposes *human* sinfulness. He turns the lights on!

### **a. The ungodliness and unrighteousness of Gentiles (1:18–32)**

Although not specifically addressed in the end of the chapter, it becomes clear later that Paul is addressing sinful *Gentile* people in 1:18–32 (see 2:17).

- This passage then is most relevant for humans who do not have any knowledge of God’s written revelation in Scripture.
  - One might wonder if these kinds of people will be held accountable for sin. I mean, they do not have scripture!
  - Paul’s indictment in this passage, however, makes it clear that they face God’s wrath because of their sin.
- There is a sense as well that Romans 1 portrays the story of human history.
  - This is what the human race did and does in the face of God.
  - The language here is gnomic, meaning that this is always true about people.

Having said all this, let’s dig into the passage. Paul’s argument in the end of chapter 1 moves from God’s unceasing wrath (vv. 18–20) to humanity’s certain culpability (21–32)

### **1) God’s unceasing and just wrath against the sins of humanity (18–20).**

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<sup>47</sup> Thielmann, *Romans*, 100.

So, we begin with God's wrath.

- a) The reality of God's unceasing wrath against sin (18).** <sup>18</sup> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

In verse 18, we see the reality of God's unceasing wrath against sin. **Read verse 18.**

Verse 18 functions as a header for the rest of the chapter. To properly understand it, there are a few important points we need to make.

- **First, we must consider what the "wrath" of God involves.**
  - This is a topic that we might not want to dwell on or, perhaps, even wished was not in Romans.
    - This will not be our favorite part of Romans, nor should it be!
    - The notion of God's punishing people is profoundly offensive in our world today, yet it is an important part of Paul's theology.
    - Paul gets on the subject and does not relent for quite some time!
  - In our own day, we tend to shy away from talking about God's righteous and burning wrath against sinners.
    - Maybe we like to think about God only in certain ways and thinking about God burning in anger against sinners is not how we like to think about God.
    - But I ask: "How much do we want to know God?" Do we want to know God as He really is—how He says He is?
    - Well, who or what is our authority? Will it be our own perspective(s) or thought(s) about who God is or how He describes Himself in His Word?
    - I trust you will submit yourself today to Him and gladly embrace what He says about Himself in His inerrant word regardless of how our culture perceives Him.
  - Now, the wrath of God is "God's settled and perfectly righteous antagonism to evil."<sup>48</sup>
    - When we think of wrath, we might wrongfully think of human anger.
    - Human anger, however, is often wrong.
    - God does not lose his temper or fly into a rage.
    - He is not vindictive or spiteful.
    - John Stott says, "Nothing arouses God's wrath except evil and evil always does."<sup>49</sup>
  - "God is a righteous God whose wrath against humanity is fair and equitable."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Thielmann, *Romans*, 113.

That is God's wrath—his strong antagonism toward sin.

- **But secondly, we must notice that this “wrath” is revealed.**
  - This is bad news for human beings.
  - While it is easy to think of wrath being something future and eternal, in this passage, Paul explains that it is something that is also already being manifested from heaven against sin.
  - The wrath of God is already being revealed from heaven and God is as angry with sin today as He was at the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
  - This begs the question: How? How has God already been revealing His wrath? Well, we will learn more about that in the rest of the passage (*verses 21–32 specifically with God handing people over*).
- **Finally, we should observe the object of His wrath.**
  - His wrath is turned against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth.
  - Nothing gets past Him.
  - God's wrath comes down on all forms of unrighteousness and ungodliness and “applies to every human who is able to suppress the truth by his or her unrighteousness.”<sup>51</sup>
  - The word “suppress” (κατεχόντων) involves preventing, restraining, or hindering something.
  - Humanity does not want the truth to be known or heard.
  - So, they deliberately stifle God and his truth and live for themselves.

Consequently, the main idea of verse 18 is Paul's portrayal of the unceasing wrath of God revealed against sin.

- b) The justness of God's unceasing wrath against sin (19–20).** <sup>19</sup> *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

To this point, Paul adds more clarity in verses 19 and 20 and explains that it is entirely just for God to treat humans this way. **Let's look at verses 19 and 20.**

In verses 19–20, Paul develops more about how people have suppressed the truth. People perceive who God is because of his initiation. People know of God's existence, his nature, and his power through creation. In other words, all cognitive people have access to some degree of knowledge of God. This speaks of the value of general revelation in creation. Creation reveals to every cognitive human that God exists and makes all men and women accountable before Him.

Although this is true, however, they do not honor God or give Him one word of genuine thanksgiving.

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<sup>51</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 41. Since Paul qualifies that his wrath is turned against those who suppress the truth, Naselli believes that infants and those with mental handicaps are exempted.

- We tend to see this passage and feel bad for people (*neighbors, friends*), but men and women, this text makes it clear that it is God who is wronged in the passage.
- He is a good and benevolent God who is slapped in the face and discarded.
- John Piper asks, “Why is it that people ... feel little, or no, remorse or indignation or outrage that God is disregarded, disbelieved, dishonored, and thus belittled, by millions and millions of people in the world?”<sup>52</sup>

The results are that humans are foolish in their way of thinking and are sinful in their whole inner being. So, God is unceasing and just in His wrath against sinners and human beings are now excuseless.

## 2) Humanity’s obstinate refusal to acknowledge or worship God (21–32).

But what does it really look like for people to hold the truth down?

In verses 21–32, Paul follows the same general pattern three times. In each one of these sections, humans “exchange” something.

- In verse 21, they exchange a knowledge of God.
- In verse 25, they exchange the truth of God.
- In verse 28, they exchange knowledge of God again.

The word “exchanged” (ἔλλαξαν) means that instead of doing one thing, they do another. In each of these statements, they not only make an exchange, but they also experience God’s judgment.

### a) Exchange 1: They exchange worship of God for worship of created things (21–24).

- **The exchange (21–23)** – <sup>21</sup> *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* <sup>22</sup> *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* <sup>23</sup> *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

So, we begin with the first exchange in verses 21–23. **Let’s read them.**

In this passage, people replace their knowledge of God. They exchange the glory of God for the glory of an image or idol. Basically, they worship what they want. They pervert worship. They worship themselves or they replace God with idols.

Actually, the text says that they give glory to man, animals, birds, and creeping things.

- This shows a digression in the types of created beings to which they are willing to ascribe honor.
- This idolatry still happens in some parts of our world today, especially on the mission field.

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<sup>52</sup> Piper, “What is Sin?”

- However, in our culture there may not *appear to be* direct parallels.
- Yet, “Paul’s words have as much relevance for people who have made money or sex or fame their gods as for those who carved idols out of wood or stone.”<sup>53</sup>
- **The result (24)** – <sup>24</sup> *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.*

***But how? How does God respond? Let’s read verse 24.***

The word “therefore” (διό) is important. In response to our attempts to dethrone God, God “gives us up” (παρέδωκεν).

- God hands humans over.
- Three times in these verses it says that God gave them up to something (vv. 24, 26, 28).
- This is fundamentally a judicial term.
- God hands them over to punishment like a judge.
- The punishment itself, however, is something that humanity craves.
- He gives them what they want!

This means that as things get worse God does not help us restrain our flesh at all. God allows our flesh to dominate us. We have no chance; we are controlled by our flesh with no help from God.

It is a grace of God to restrain men and women and cultures from manifesting the worst forms of debauchery. But, in this text, God decides to remove this in response to human sinfulness.

Now, what do you suppose happens to humanity when God ceases to restrict humans? What happens when the grip of God is released from a man? What happens when the one squirming in the restraining hand of God is finally released?

Well, what happens when anything that is suspended is finally released?

- The result is that mankind is plunged into utter hopelessness and debauchery.
- Like being hurled over a cliff with nowhere to grab to be rescued, mankind is left to spiral to greater and greater depths of depravity.

**b) Exchange 2: They exchange God’s truth for a lie (25–27).**

That leads to a second exchange.

- **The exchange (25)** – <sup>25</sup> *Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

In verse 25, people exchange the truth about God for a lie. ***Read it.***

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<sup>53</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 110.

The truth of God is the truth about God—the true conception of his being. This understanding of the true God is exchanged for idolatry—the worship of a creature or something God has created.

- **The result (26–27)** – <sup>26</sup> *For this reason God gave them up to a dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error.*

This exchange results in God giving humanity over to unnatural impurity and dishonorable passions. The phrase “passions of dishonor” is Paul’s way of describing the nature of these passions to which God gives people over. They are dishonorable, disgraceful, evil passions.

One can talk about natural ways (“sexual immorality”) and unnatural ways to engage in immorality (“homosexuality” and “lesbianism”), for instance. This text reveals that humanity’s depravity extends to the unnatural.

Now, if talking about God’s wrath is unpopular today, then talking about homosexuality will downright get us into trouble! How dare we condemn anyone’s personal autonomy? Yet, let’s just see what the Bible says about it here.

- This unnatural perversity is described in our text as involving women and men.<sup>54</sup>
- The description of the male’s perversity is lengthened.
  - They 1) forsake sexual relations with women, 2) burn in their lusts for other men, and 3) engage in shameful acts with other men.
  - That is, their activity digresses until they consummate their sin in a perverse way.
  - This same-sex lust results in shameless acts and the “due penalty of their error.”
  - It is due or necessary in the sense that this is what they deserve.
- This might be just a final way of talking about their lust and homosexuality itself or it speaks of physical and moral consequences of the sin of homosexuality. ‘
- I think Paul might have something in mind here that affects men and women “in themselves.”

Have you ever wondered why God chooses the sin of homosexuality here?

- It is because it functions as the best illustration of that which is unnatural.
- It involves taking something God has given and twisting and replacing it with our own creation.

So, this passage clearly condemns homosexuality as a result of the perverse digression of the human heart that is not restrained by God.

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<sup>54</sup> Why are females listed first? Two possible reasons might be offered. First, Paul might list women first so that he can end with a fuller treatment of male perversion which was more prevalent in his day. Second, Paul might start with females “for the purpose of accentuating the grossness of the evil.” Cf. Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 104.

- As we talk about this, let's remember though that this affects us here.
- Many brothers and sisters here have children (*or friends or family members*) who manifest these sins, and it breaks their hearts to consider God's clear and condemning words in this passage.
- Although we hold the truth of God's Word, we must be loving, gracious, and kind to those made in the image of God even while condemning their sin.
- Might we also remember that the third time Paul mentions "homosexuality" is in 1 Corinthians 6 when he talks about how God has saved some of the Corinthians from this sinful lifestyle.
- The gospel offers help to anyone in any sin!

**c) Exchange 3: They exchange knowledge of God for no knowledge of Him (28–32).**

- **The exchange (28a)** – <sup>28</sup> *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God.*

In verse 28, we have a shortened form of the pattern that we have already seen. **Read it.**

Now, as humans degenerate, they do not even like to keep any room for God in their mind. They do not even like to think about Him at all and thus reason Him out of existence.

- **The result (28b–32)** – *God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* <sup>29</sup> *They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,* <sup>30</sup> *slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,* <sup>31</sup> *foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* <sup>32</sup> *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

There are three results of this last exchange:

- **First, they are given over to a disqualified mind.**

Verse 28 says that God gives them over to a debased mind. A debased mind is twisted. This is a mind in which the distinctives between right and wrong are confused or lost [entirely].<sup>55</sup> A debased mind is "a mind that no longer functions properly in its capacity of thinking about moral and spiritual truths."<sup>56</sup> They become unable to think clearly or correctly on moral issues. Since they see God as unfit, they get an unfit mind.

We see this same sort of disqualified thinking in our world today.

- A people like this will be like the fool who calls evil good and good evil.
- They will soon struggle to define and understand basic things regarding sexuality like: "What is a woman?" "What is a man?"

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<sup>55</sup> Erdman, *Romans*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary*, 111.

- They will see a problem like illegitimate births among young people and offer their solutions:
  - Birth control- The problem to them is illegitimate births; the solution is birth control. So, they attempt to remove the shame of the situation by providing protection; instead of going to the real solution (*abstinence*).
  - Abortion- The problem is illegitimate births; the solution is abortion.

These solutions show unfit minds. They replace God because he is unfit and their minds become more and more unfit!

- **They manifest all kinds of vice.**

Once God gives fallen humanity over, they not only practice homosexual sins, they manifest a whole host of vices listed in verses 29–32. In these verses, Paul lists 21 other ways where their depraved hearts take them. They are full of these kind of things. **Read verses 29–31.**

- **Their perversity becomes a settled conviction.**

Finally, in the first part of verse 32, we can see that they are so perverse that they not only commit their original sins as the result of some momentary passion but are encouraging sin out of a settled conviction. John Murray says it this way: “We are not only bent on damning ourselves, but we congratulate others in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in damnation.”<sup>57</sup>

It has become so bad for them that their minds are no longer capable of approving what is right. Their consciences no longer condemn them over their sin, and they are very comfortable and settled in their sin.

A people like this will not be content if a culture tolerates their sinful lifestyle, they will be proud of it, and demand that we all celebrate it.

- R. Kent Hughes says, “This, I think, was one of the supreme horrors of the Roman Coliseum. Those committing the mayhem were supremely guilty, but those watching and applauding were perhaps even more wretched. What a telling application this has on our media-captivated society. Millions sit in their living rooms watching debauchery, violence, deceit, and many other vices – and applaud what they see!”<sup>58</sup>
- We must not give approval to people who are saying and doing things for which God will send them to hell.

So, we have left, at least, one question unanswered: How is God’s wrath presently being revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness? The answer is that all

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<sup>57</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 53.

<sup>58</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, 47.

around us God is handing people over to their own lusts and passions. “God’s wrath is revealed in the fact of his abandoning sinners to their own ways, allowing them to degenerate morally, socially, and spiritually.”<sup>59</sup> The downward spiral of people and cultures is a sure sign of God’s condemning wrath. May God help us and may we, Christians, accept our God the way he is and worship him in his holiness and righteousness!

#### b. The ungodliness of the Jews (2:1–3:8)

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul reveals that God’s wrath is against all forms of human sin and ungodliness.

- He starts with what is always true of ungodly *Gentile* people who suppress God’s truth.
- That is, lost humanity is constantly preventing, restraining, hindering something.
  - They do not want **the truth about God** to affect them or others in any way, so they deliberately stifle God and his truth so that they can pursue living for themselves.
  - And that is exactly what God allows them to pursue which leads to **unnatural passions** and **lusts** like homosexuality and all kinds of **other vices** like the ones listed in verses 29–31.

*<sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*

- It gets so bad for lost Gentile humanity that God hands them over to **debased minds**—minds that no longer function properly in their evaluation of morality and truth.
  - That is, they become unable to think clearly or correctly on moral issues.
  - Sadly, we see this kind of moral confusion all around the world today!

In the next section, Paul uncovers the ungodliness of *the Jewish people* who are under God’s wrath (2:1–3:8).

- In Romans 2 and the first part of Romans 3, Paul 1) deflates the sources of Jewish presumption and pride before 2) correcting possible misunderstandings that his words might produce.
- So, in Romans 2, Paul is “pricking the balloon” of Jewish pride.

Have you ever seen a child with a balloon? Imagine the child taking the balloon everywhere. It gets in the way of everything. Well, Paul pops the balloon of Jewish pride—the source of Jewish pride and confidence.

This analogy might help us keep the whole picture in mind as we work through Romans 2 in the next few weeks.

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<sup>59</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary*, 68.

## 1) Deflating Jewish presumption and pride (2:1–29)<sup>60</sup>

More specifically, he sweeps away two sources of Jewish pride. I can show this in the opening of each section.

- **Look at verse 1.**

- In this passage, Paul shifts from third person plural (“they, them”) in Romans 1 to second person singular (“you”) in 2:1–5 and confronts an imagined opponent.
  - This is a form of writing called diatribe, where Paul creates an imaginary debating partner.
- But what kind of person is Paul talking to here?
  - Who is the “you” and the “O man” and the “you, the judge”?
  - Now, unfortunately, this is a matter of much debate.
  - While some believe that Paul is confronting *any* person who hypocritically judges others (“the moralist”),<sup>61</sup> the answer comes clearly at the beginning of his second sweeping argument.

- **Look at verse 17.**

- Paul goes away from second person singulars in verses 6–16 but calls out his imagined opponent again in verse 17 with “you” and “yourself.”
  - “You” call “yourself” a Jew and rely on the law (v. 17) ...
  - “You” are instructed from the law (v. 18b) ...
  - “You” are sure that “you yourself” are a guide to the blind (v. 19a).
- “You” refers primarily to an imaginary *Jewish* opponent who judges *Gentile* sinners while doing the same sins.
- Perhaps, Paul starts generally so that Jewish people read further into his argument before they close the scroll and dismiss him entirely!<sup>62</sup>
- This might be how Paul arranged his synagogue sermons too.
- Acts tells us about these Pauline interactions. Some believed Paul and others rejected him.

Now, having seen this clear identification of the “imaginary man” who sits in judgment over the sinners of chapter 1, we should note that verses 1 and 17 are headers for two arguments that Paul makes against the Jewish people in Romans 2.

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<sup>60</sup> Although James Dunn holds to the new perspective of Paul, his characterization of this passage is somewhat helpful. The language of “deflating Jewish presumption” comes from his commentary on Romans. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC, 77. Later, he talks about “a pricking of the balloon of Jewish pride and presumption.” Dunn, *Romans*, 108.

<sup>61</sup> F. F. Bruce and John Stott, for instance, argue that Paul has the “moralist” in view—people who are hypocritical in their judgments on others. Cf. Bruce, *Romans*, 81; Stott, *Romans*, 80ff.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps, this is how he approached opportunities to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ in Jewish synagogues as well.

This section deals with two Jewish badges that were the source of *Jewish* presumption and pride. Their presumption rested on two props: 1) possession of the law (vv. 1–16; esp. 12–16) and 2) the physical mark of circumcision (vv. 17–29; esp. 25–29).

#### a) Presuming on possession of the law (2:1–16)

In verses 1–16, Paul makes a long argument about Jewish confidence in the possession of the law. Within this passage, Paul makes three arguments (*three paragraphs*) about God that hold true not only for *Jewish* presumption but for *anyone* who thinks he will escape God’s judgment. We will consider two of these arguments today and the other next week.

- **First, God will judge hypocritical judges (1–5).**

Paul begins with an initial argument in verse 1. **Read it.**

- **Initial Argument (1)** – <sup>1</sup> *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.*

Paul begins by suggesting that there is no excuse for the man or woman who judges others while committing the “very same things.” The Jewish opponent might *imagine* that he is free from the Gentile sins of homosexuality and idolatry, but Paul’s list of sins in verses 29–31 condemns everyone!

The lust in the hearts of the *Jewish* people led to the same sins that the Gentiles practiced. Paul could not be clearer: “You, the judge, practice the very same things.”

**Charles Erdman** has a little red book on Romans that quickly summarizes Paul’s arguments. It is quite good. About this verse, he writes, “A large part of the religion of some men seems to consist in their readiness to find fault with others.”<sup>63</sup>

- Paul’s opening argument about hypocritical judging is a strong warning to us not to boast in our own self-righteousness *nor* to cast strong condescending looks on others for *their* sins.
- This is so important for us! We can easily be blinded by our own pride!
- As we prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Table later, we should ask:

*“Have I issued judgments on another brother or sister in Christ?”*

*“Have I been critical of others about their sin while forgetting my own?”*

*“Would someone here have reason to call me— “You, the judge.”?”*

- Sadly, the Jewish people are not the only ones who can be inflated with pride!
- One of the greatest foundations for unity in our church is the conviction that “I am not better than you.” “I am every bit as much a sinner as you.” “Who am I to judge you?”

- Have you ever come face to face with your sin?

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<sup>63</sup> Erdman, *Romans*, 36.

- Has it caused you to whirl and spin?
  - Have you ever been struck with the depths of your sin?
  - If so, may we not forget it!
- Humility is also one of the greatest foundations for affectionate, caring evangelism.
    - May we be careful not to issue judgments over the sins of others, considering that we often have committed the same things!
    - May God not look at us and say, “You, the judges, commit the same things.”
- **Shared idea (2)** – <sup>2</sup> *We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.*

That leads Paul to state something that both he and his imaginary sparring partner agree with in verse 2. **Read it.**

Although his Jewish opponent does not agree with Paul in verse 1, he clearly believes that God’s judgment rightly comes down on all those who practice the sins of Romans 1. The fires of hell burn to punish Gentile sinners! Because people have sinned in these ways, God’s judgment is fair, just, and right. That is, God’s judgment is in accordance with the facts.

- **Questions (3–4)** – <sup>3</sup> *Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?* <sup>4</sup> *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

But after this momentary agreement, Paul cuts to the chase by asking two powerful rhetorical questions to this imaginary man or woman in verses 3 and 4. **Let’s read them.**

- Paul’s first cutting question has to do with the math of this man.
  - The word “suppose” (λογίζη) means to count, figure, or reckon.
  - It’s a math term.
  - This man comes up with some figures that show that he’ll be alright.
  - His calculations, however, are wrong!
  - “Paul knows that people [often] add up the evidence and exonerate themselves.”<sup>64</sup>
  - That is the whole point of his first question!
- Paul drives his point home strongly with his second question in verse 4.
  - He asks if these Jewish objectors “presume” on “the riches of” (*intensifies the nouns*) God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience.
  - And, men and women, the OT is full of illustrations of the Jewish people being self-deceived and blind to their own sinful actions.

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<sup>64</sup> Yarbrough, *Romans*, 51.

- In doing so, they took God’s patience and forbearance for granted.
  - They stood with the fool in the Psalms and Proverbs who says, “God has surely forgotten *my* sins.”
  - God was tolerating their sins and giving them some time to repent.
  - God was restraining his wrath from annihilating them so that they would change their minds and come back to him.
- **Final Condemnation (5)** – <sup>5</sup> *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Instead, however, things end differently for Paul’s opponents in this passage. Paul ends with strong words of final condemnation on “you, the judge” in verse 5. **Read it.**

Paul vividly pictures *the Jewish, hypocritical judge* as “storing up” or “treasuring up” for himself God’s wrath on the day of final judgment. The word for “storing up” (θησαυρίζεις) could be translate treasuring up. This is a Greek term that sounds like our English word thesaurus (*a treasury of synonyms*).

Normally, this was a metaphor for collecting something good. Not so in this case!

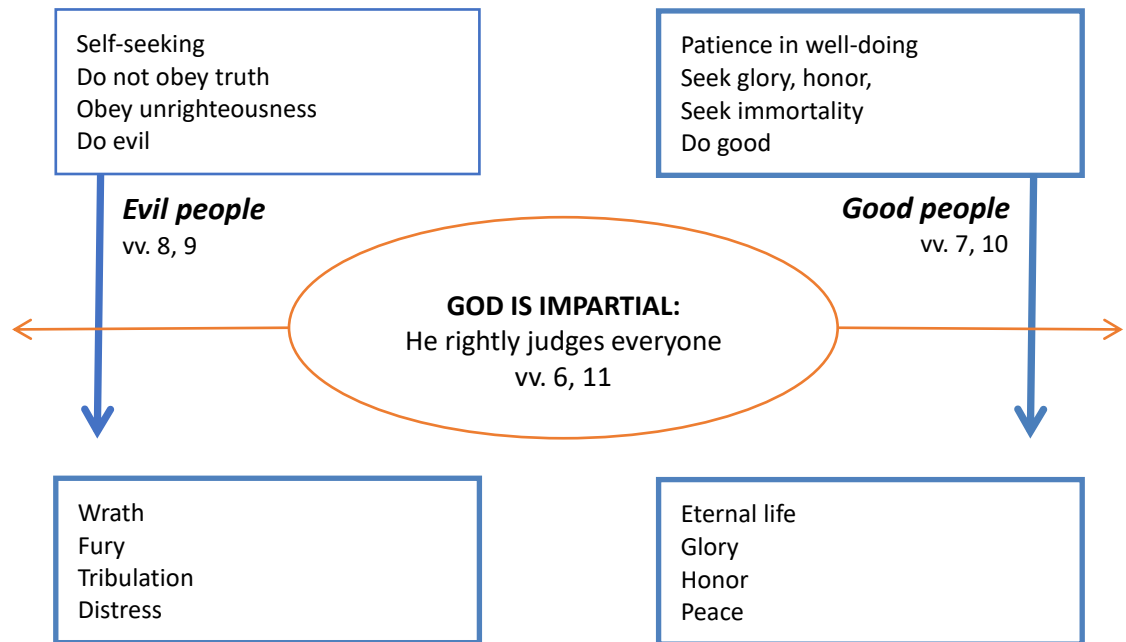
- This man failed to repent *because* his heart was hard and impenitent and, consequently, he was building up more and more final wrath for himself on the day of judgment.
- Imagine if every day, you were delivered a brick in the mail.
- But, instead of doing something with it, you opened your attic and threw the brick up there.
- Every day the same thing happened—you received a brick and threw it up into your attic.
- Day after day you get a brick and, day after day, you throw it in your attic.
  - Eventually the ceiling sags because of all the weight.
  - It might even start to crack.
- But, day after day, you keep throwing bricks into the attic until the ceiling gives way and the immense weight of what you have stored up comes crashing down on you!
- This is what we do when we judge others and forget our own sin.

Men and women, we must not abuse the goodness, patience, and forbearance of God! We must not store up God’s wrath for a future day! **God will judge us based on how we really are!** At the Lord’s Table, we should ask: “Am I resentful toward someone?” “God, have you been forbearing my judgmental spirit?” Why not go to the one who can forgive it all?

- **Second, God judges impartially (6–11).**

***Let’s read verses 6–11.***

What are we supposed to do with these verses? Well, to understand these verses, we must see three cycles. These cycles give the destiny of two groups. The following diagram, adapted from Kenneth Boa's commentary, illustrates what Paul is doing:<sup>65</sup>



Paul uses a rhetorical device in this text—a chiasm—to emphasize his point.<sup>66</sup> Verses 6 and 11 belong together, so do verses 7 and 10, and verses 8 and 9. Let's take some time to look at the three cycles, that teach God's impartiality in judgment.

- **Cycle 1: God rewards good (7, 10).** <sup>7</sup> *To those who be patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;* <sup>10</sup> *But glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

In verses 7 and 10, Paul talks about those who do good. Specifically, these people are **patient in well doing** (ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ), they **seek glory** (ζητοῦσιν δόξαν), **honor** (τιμὴν), and **immortality** (ἀφθαρσίαν). They are persistent in doing good works, and they seek all the right things.

**But who are these people? Is this description of works salvation? What do you think?** There are three main possibilities:

- The WORKS SALVATION view – Some believe that Paul offers salvation through works or personal merits.
  - Some people will be obedient enough to gain eternal life in heaven.
  - These special few will be rewarded by God.
  - If all we had was this passage, we might think this is what it is, but later we learn no one can do this (cf. *Rom 3:10b–12*).
  - The rest of scripture contradicts this idea as well.

<sup>65</sup> Material adapted from Kenneth Boa, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary, 78.

<sup>66</sup> A (v. 6), B (v. 7), C (v. 8), C<sup>1</sup> (v. 9), B<sup>1</sup> (v. 10), A<sup>1</sup> (v. 11)

- The THEORETICAL/HYPOTHETICAL view – Others, however, believe that God actually promises eternal life to all those who continue in these acts.
  - This is a valid offer, but as Paul continues to develop his thoughts in Rom 1–3, he demonstrates that “no human being will be justified by works” (3:20).
  - In other words, salvation by perfect law-keeping is theoretically possible, although no one will ever be able to attain it.
  - Perhaps, this is Christ’s point with the rich young ruler (see *Matt 19:16–22*).
  - The offer is on the shelf, but all we can do is see it. *We cannot get there!*
  - Although this is an excellent view, there may be another good way to explain the passage.
- The SUGGESTIVE view – Others believe that it is at least strongly implied in this text that the only type of people who continue in this way are believers.
  - In other words, only true Christians will seek after good and continue in these things.
  - So, it’s implied that Paul is talking about believers in this passage.

Regardless, the point is that God rewards those who *truly* persevere in good works. He rewards good.

- **Cycle 2: God punishes evil (8–9).** <sup>8</sup> *But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.* <sup>9</sup> *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

But, perhaps, even more important for Paul’s point to hypocritical people—God will punish evil. Some who insist on their own righteousness are actually **self-seeking** (ἐριθείας), they **do not obey the truth** (ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), but **obey unrighteousness** (πειθομένοις τῇ ἀδικίᾳ), and **do evil** (κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν).

People who behave in this way are subject to God’s judgment in the form of **wrath** (ὀργή), **fury** (θυμός), **tribulation** (θλίψις), and **distress** (στενοχωρία).

- Wrath carries the idea of swelling up. God’s anger comes from his settled nature but builds.
- Fury speaks of God’s bubbling or agitated anger.
- Tribulation is used of pressure that crushes (e.g. *the crushing of the grapes of wrath at Armageddon*).
- Distress is anguish caused by severe confinement.

In sum, it will be utterly miserable for those who do evil. God will squash them!

- **Cycle 3: God judges all impartially (6, 11).** <sup>6</sup> *He will render to each one according to his works;* <sup>11</sup> *For God shows no partiality.*

But then we come to Paul’s main point. God is impartial in His judgment. The ground is level before the righteous judge.

This is an important point for Paul to stress to the one who thinks that he can sit in judgment on others while partaking in the same lifestyle. No one is exempted! God will judge every single person here and he will do so on the basis of our works!

It seems to me that verse 6 is a citation of ***Psalm 62:12***. In this passage, the psalmist emphasizes repeatedly that salvation will come repeatedly from God and that it does not rest on the efforts of men and women, but then he concludes by saying that God will render judgment to each person according to his or her work.

We will all stand one day before the infinitely holy and perfect Judge of the whole earth! Let us now rightly examine ourselves as we prepare to remember the only sacrifice that saves.

- **Third, God holds *all* people accountable to his law (12–16).**

In Rom 2:1–3:8, Paul uncovers the ungodliness of *the Jewish people* who are under God’s wrath. Although he starts generally with “O man” in 2:1, he makes it quite clear in 2:17 that he is dealing with the Jewish people all throughout this section (“*You call yourself a Jew*”). Paul creates an imaginary sparring partner in this passage, but this person represents the sort of person that Paul has been dealing with for over 20 years now. Paul is dealing with a normal Jewish man or woman in this passage.

**Now, Paul is deflating the sources of Jewish pride and presumption, pricking the balloon of pride in the law (1–16) and circumcision (17–29).** It’s like a child with two balloons who takes them everywhere and believes they make him better than everyone else. So, Paul pops the balloon of law-possession in this section and circumcision in the next.

Clearly, Paul’s predominant consideration in this passage is the Jewish people and, first, he goes after their belief that possessing the law of Moses exempts them from judgment.

- Imagine a Jewish person with a Torah scroll in his hand pointing at the sins of the Gentiles.
- This Jewish man thinks that the book in his hand will keep him from judgment.
- So, in this passage, Paul says, “Wait a second! God will judge you too! God *will* judge hypocritical judges and He *will* judge *impartially*.”

It is at this point that we pick up and finish Paul’s argument about God’s judgment in verses 12–16. Here we learn one final idea about God: God holds *all* people—both Jew and Gentile—accountable to his law (vv. 12–16).

To see more clearly that Paul is “popping” the balloon of “having” the Law in this first big argument, we must note that Paul introduces the word νόμος (“law”) for the first time in Romans in verse 12 and then mentions “law” 11 times in this one paragraph alone (*look at each one*). No doubt, this passage is about the law.

Paul will not allow Jews to presume upon “law possession” as a false security. So, he deflates their pride two ways.

- **First, he declares God’s judgment on *all* people (12).**

In verse 12, Paul divides all humanity into two categories: 1) those without the law and 2) those under the law. Let's see what he says, first, about those without the law. **Read v. 12a.**

- **Gentile judgment (12a)** – <sup>12</sup> *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law,*

In verse 12, Paul deals more thoroughly (γάρ) with the point he just made about God judging impartially in verses 6–11. That is, “this verse shows how ‘God shows no partiality.’”<sup>67</sup> God will judge all humanity, whether they have the law of Moses in writing or not!

In demonstrating this, he starts with the judgment of Gentiles—those “who sin without the law” (ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον). When considering those who did not grow up under or perhaps were even aware of the law system that God gave to Moses, Paul makes two points with two verbs.

- First, they sinned (ἥμαρτον).
  - They fell short or missed the mark.
  - This is the first time that Paul uses this verb in Romans, yet throughout the book he argues for “universal human sinfulness.”
  - All sin and fall short of God’s glory.
  - At its core, the word “sin” speaks of an offense against God that ruptures the relationship entirely and demands condemnation and judgment.
  - So, first, those without the law sinned.
- Then, it says, “They will perish” (ἀπολοῦνται).
  - This word means that they will be lost.
  - They will suffer the results of a negative final verdict from God.
  - They will be eternally punished.
    - The word “perish” is used in the standard Greek translation of **Psa 9:5** (*You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked ‘perish;’ you have blotted out their name forever and ever*) and **Psa 37:20** (*The wicked will ‘perish;’ they vanish—like the smoke they vanish away*).
    - It does not mean that they will be annihilated or cease to exist; instead, they will suffer eternally under the full weight of God’s wrath in hell.

This condemnation, however, comes to them not on the basis of their hearing the Mosaic law. They did not have that privilege, so God will not judge them on that basis. They **will** be judged for their sin, however.

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<sup>67</sup> Yarbrough, *Romans*, 54.

- **Jewish judgment (12b)** – *and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.*

That leads to his brief summative statement about *Jewish* judgment at the end of verse 12. **Look there.**

Paul’s simple argument about *Jewish* condemnation involves two points here as well.

- The ones “under the law sinned” (ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον). Despite the advantage of being “in the law” or “within the sphere or influence of the law,” they sinned.
- So, they will be “judged by the law” (διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται). God will hold them accountable to the revelation that He has given them. The law of Moses holds them accountable as the legal standard for their behavior.

So, as Paul considers the fate of the Jew who boasts in his status as possessor of the law, he begins simply—*everyone* who sins *is* judged by God.

- **Second, Paul establishes two ideas that totally undermine Jewish confidence in law possession (13–16).**

As we continue in the passage, Paul more strongly challenges those who feel exempt from judgment *because* they have the law. In verses 13–16, Paul deflates their confidence in law possession with two jabs.

- **First, he argues that justification requires *obedience* not *hearing* (13)** – <sup>13</sup> *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.*

**Look with me at verse 13.**

Paul continues (γάρ) on from the end of verse 12 in considering the advantage of the Jew.<sup>68</sup> They did have the advantage of being “the hearers” (οἱ ἀκροαταὶ) of the law of Moses. The OT reveals many significant times when the law was read to the Israelite people. Let me mention a few:

*Deut 31:9–13* - <sup>9</sup> *Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.* <sup>10</sup> *And Moses commanded them, ‘At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths,* <sup>11</sup> *when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.* <sup>12</sup> *Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law,* <sup>13</sup> *and that their children, who have not*

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<sup>68</sup> Paul likely uses a chiasm in Rom 2:12–16: A- Gentile sin (12a), B- Jewish sin (12b), B<sup>1</sup>- Jewish judgment (13), A<sup>1</sup>- Gentile judgment (14–16).

*known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”*

In this passage, Moses writes the law and they read it. They will read it every seven years.

*2 Kgs 23:1–3 – <sup>1</sup> Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. <sup>2</sup> And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.*

King Josiah issues reforms and they find the law.

*Neh 8:1–8 – <sup>1</sup> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. <sup>4</sup> And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Mehullam on his left hand. <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.... <sup>8</sup> They read from the book from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

Ezra leads in a reading. Everyone is interested in revival these days (Asbury), maybe I will say something about that in the future. Imagine, however, the deep spiritual experience that everyone enjoyed on this day when the Law was read.

Even after these times, they enjoyed the privilege of hearing the law read to them in the Temple and later in synagogues around the world. Sabbath after sabbath after sabbath they heard the Torah of God.

Hearing the law was a good thing, yet hearing was not enough. They must be “the doers of the law” (οἱ ποιῆται νόμου). Only *doers* will be justified before an impartial judge! What is the point? Mere possession of the law will not exempt you—you must obey the law. They had failed to read the terms of the agreement!

Perhaps, you felt you qualified for some refund or rebate until someone told you the terms of the offer! Imagine thinking that your children qualified you for tax refunds only to learn later that they must be 17 or younger to qualify! The terms for the Jews was—You must perfectly obey the Law to be justified in that way!

- **Second, Paul demonstrates that the Gentiles have the law too (14–16)** – <sup>14</sup> *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.* <sup>15</sup> *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* <sup>16</sup> *on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

Now, if their law balloon isn't completely deflated yet, Paul takes things further in verses 14–16 when he returns to his consideration of the judgment of *Gentiles* (“*For when Gentiles*”). Let's read through this passage and then answer two questions: 1) What does this mean and then 2) why does Paul argue this way.

**Read verses 14–16.**

- **What does Paul mean?**

Now, this is actually a hard question to answer. Verses 14 through 16 are more challenging than they first appear. I have summarized what they teach in three statements.

- **Statement #1: Although Gentiles do not have the law, they sometimes obey it (v. 14a).**

Scholars struggle with what Paul says here about Gentiles obeying the law. They wonder how this could be with some scholars suggesting that Paul must have in mind only Gentile *believers* in this passage.<sup>69</sup> Instead, Paul leaves indefinite the number of Gentiles who actually do this *and* does not suggest that Gentiles *perfectly* or *always* obey the law. Paul is saying that Gentiles “occasionally abide by the law, indicating thereby that they are aware of moral norms.”<sup>70</sup> That is, *sometimes* Gentiles obey God's law.

The word “when” could be translated “whenever” to help us feel more clearly what is going on in the passage. This is why unbelievers sometimes feel the need to obey parents or are outraged at stealing, lying, murder, abuse, and some forms of sexual immorality. They are not always the worst that they can be.

- **Statement #2: Their partial obedience to the law condemns their disobedience (v. 14b).**

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<sup>69</sup> See Cranfield, *Romans*, 153–60. Cranfield believes that Paul has Jeremiah's new covenant promises in mind when he describes Gentiles as having “the work of the law written on their hearts.” He suggests that only believers could be described in this way.

<sup>70</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 124.

From this premise, Paul draws a conclusion. This is my second statement. ***Their partial obedience to the law, condemns their disobedience.*** We see this when Paul says that Gentiles become “a law unto themselves.” Not having the law proper, their own behavior occasionally reflects God’s moral law. Their own *partial* obedience to the law demonstrates what the standard is—obedience to God’s law.

- **Statement #3: They sometimes obey the law because God has written it on their hearts (vv. 15–16).**

To this conclusion, Paul adds a final explanation. This is how I take verses 15 and 16. ***Their occasional obedience to a law that they do not have shows that God has written the work of the law on their hearts.***

- They do not have the law in their hand, they have its required works or deeds on their hearts.
- ***But in what sense is it written on their hearts?***
  - Well, the answer is not literally, but metaphorically.
  - One man writes: “God has put into the hearts of all people a basic moral sense of right and wrong.”<sup>71</sup>
  - To say that another way, God’s put his moral standard within them.

Further, he’s given them a “reflective mechanism” to measure if they have obeyed God’s law.

- This reflective mechanism is the conscience.
- ***But what is the conscience?***
  - The conscience is a gift from God that he places within a person.
  - It is an inward monitor that measures whether we have conformed to or violated God’s law.
  - And this inward monitor bears witness to us now and later to God through accusing or excusing thoughts and on the final day of judgment when Jesus judges even the “secrets” of men and women, the conscience ***will*** testify.
  - You see, there will be “no possibility of a miscarriage of justice” at the final judgment for Gentiles *because* their secrets and thoughts and consciences will declare whether they’ve attained to the required works or deeds of the law that God wrote on their hearts!

***Do you have confidence in your own standing before God and others?*** Do you realize that if we are left to ourselves that our consciences will give up everything—all the accusing thoughts that go through our heads and

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<sup>71</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Guide to Romans*, 168.

condemn. Our conscience would go to the witness stand and give up everything about all our hidden lusts, covetousness, hatred, greed, and anger. Men and women, we cannot walk around here with our chests puffed out because of our own deeds!

- I mean, ***how can I stand up here week after week to preach?***
- ***How can any of us expect to help anyone?***
  - The answer is that we stand in his righteousness and are empowered by his Holy Spirit.
  - That is the only way!
  - My wife reminded me of something that she heard this week.
  - When Charles Spurgeon would go into the pulpit every week at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he would say on every step, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”
  - It’s only *because* of God’s work to make us righteous that we can help anyone with the Word. It is not in us! It is God through us!

Wow! That is what this text means! So, with this understanding of verses 14 through 16 in mind—that even Gentiles have a form of the law written on their hearts, we must now ask: ***Why?***

- **Why does Paul argue this way?**

Well, that is when we remember that he tells us who he is actually writing about in this greater passage. He is addressing the average Jewish person of his day who believes that he has something special that exempts him from judgment—a ***get out of jail fee card***—possession of the law, and Paul tells him, “You are not the only one who has the Law! Gentiles do too!”

And with that we hear the “pop” of their special source of pride! It is like when you first started receiving the old Publisher’s Clearing House adds—“You have won and may be a millionaire!” “Wow,” you thought! But then someone told you, “Everyone gets these!”

***As we close, I ask: Do you think that anything exempts you from God’s judgment?*** Perhaps, you can answer that question in your ABS or community group today. ***What do we think will exempt us from judgment?***

- Maybe you boast in your family history—your heritage?
- Maybe you boast in your own goodness or works?
- Maybe you take confidence in your baptism?

**b) Presuming on Jewish advantages and circumcision (2:17–29)**

Paul has been deflating sources of Jewish pride in Romans 2. He’s already undermined any person who might think that possessing or hearing the law would exempt him from God’s judgment. At the end of the passage, he takes things even farther. In Rom 2:17–29, he will start generally by condemning other sources of Jewish advantage (17–24) before condemning a final source of Jewish pride and presumption—the sign of circumcision (25–29).

We have used the illustration of a child thinking that his balloons make him more special than any other child. The Jews boasted in God's law and God's sign. So, in Romans 2, Paul pops their two sources of false security—the law and circumcision.

***Have you ever been around someone who was proud of his or her ethnic heritage? I***

have experienced this a bit in my doctoral studies in Australia with one of the NT profs, Michael Bird.

- Now, Mike is *genuinely* funny.
- He is short, red-headed, sarcastic, and he has an amazing accent!
- Well, Mike demonstrated his *ethnic* pride one day in class.
- He is originally from Brisbane, and he continually argued with both me—the American—and the other students—the Australians—about how much superior Brisbane is to either.
  - Their sense of humor is better, their work ethic, their national pride, their food—everything is better in Brisbane!
  - His clinching argument was that they also have a real sport—Rugby Union!
  - America *only* has football and Australia has an inferior form of rugby.

Well, I am *pretty* sure Mike was joking! 😊 Sometimes, however, people inflate their own nation's value and demonstrate blind nationalistic arrogance! We should be careful that our boast is not *American* pride, but the cross of Jesus Christ—but that is a different sermon for another day!

- **Boasting in *various* Jewish advantages (17–24)**

So, Paul starts in verse 17 by examining various privileges that the Jewish person might claim for himself. Paul clearly continues his dialogue between himself and an imagined, normal, Jewish person. Paul begins with this person's self-perception (17–20) before his condemnation (21–24).

***Let's read of this man's self-perception in verses 17–20.***

- ***Jewish self-perception (17–20)*** – <sup>17</sup> *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God* <sup>18</sup> *and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;* <sup>19</sup> *and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,* <sup>20</sup> *an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth*

Paul believed that the average Jew of his day might boast in any one of nine *perceived* advantages.

- **You call yourself a Jew** (σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ἐπονομάζη) – First, he calls himself a Jew. This is not derogatory or antisemitic in any way! Exactly the opposite is true. God has a special plan for His people and both Jesus and Paul loved them, being Jews themselves. This imagined person, however, delights to identify himself with his special name. He gladly identifies himself with this name that speaks of his religious heritage and privilege.

- **You rely on the law** (ἐπαναπαύη νόμῳ) – But he not only has a special name, he also has the law. The verb that Paul uses here is only found here in the NT, but it is crucial. It means to “rest on” or “lean on” something physically or metaphorically. So, this Jewish person trusts in or depends on the law as a guarantee of his privilege.
- **You boast in God** (καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ) – Next, he boasts in God. He feels that he has a unique relationship with God. This expression “has a negative connotation and means to boast about his relationship to God.”<sup>72</sup> Those from other nations cannot boast in Yahweh!
- **You know God’s will** (γινώσκεις τὸ θέλημα) – Fourth, literally, he knows “the will.” This absolute use of the word “will” was “a customary Jewish way to refer to God’s will.”<sup>73</sup> One well-known book in the Apocrypha exclaims: “Happy are we, Israel, because we know what is pleasing to God” (*Baruch 4:4*).
- **You approve what is excellent** (δοκιμάζεις τὰ διαφέροντα) – Next, this man perceives that he approves what is excellent. He is confident that he knows the best course of action in all matters because God’s law is his instruction.
- **You are sure** (πέποιθάς σεαυτὸν) – Finally, this man is sure—he is confident. As he compares himself to Gentiles, he is sure that he is a ...
  - **A guide to the blind** (ὁδηγὸν εἶναι τυφλῶν)
  - **A light to those in darkness** (φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει)
  - **An instructor of fools** (παιδευτὴν ἀφρόνων)
  - **A teacher of children** (διδάσκαλον νηπίων)

Gentiles are the blind, those in darkness, fools, and immature. He is a guide, light, instructor, and teacher. And all this is true because he has the embodiment—the complete and perfect expression—of truth and knowledge in the law of Moses. According to Paul, this is how a typical Jewish person *perceived* himself.

But *perception*—our own perception—can be wrong! This is true not just of them, it is also true of us. We can be comfortable with who we are—yet remain lost in our trespasses and sins.

#### ○ **Jewish condemnation (21–24)**

After describing all the privileges that the Jewish person claims, Paul moves to condemnation. There is a large gap between what he thinks about himself and how things actually are. So, Paul condemns him with five leading questions and a final word drawn from scripture.

**Let’s look at the questions in verses 21–24.**

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<sup>72</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 180.

<sup>73</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary*, 181.

- **Condemning questions (21–23)** – <sup>21</sup> *You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?* <sup>22</sup> *You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?* <sup>23</sup> *You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.*

Paul asks five questions in the same form. One could translate them all consistently with the beginning words: “You who” with the second part of each beginning with “do you.” My preferred translation looks like this:

*You then who teach others, do you teach yourself?*  
*You who preach against stealing, do you steal?*  
*You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?*  
*You who hate idols, do you rob temples?*  
*You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?*

With each question, Paul condemns the hypocrisy of the typical Jewish person. He condemns them generally and then for stealing, adultery, robbing temples, and dishonoring God.

I want to mention two things here.

- **First, the idea of “robbing temples” at the end of verse 22 is a bit mysterious.** It comes from one word (ἱεροσυλεῖς) that mashes the words for robbing and temples together into one. What he means by robbing temples, however, is not at all clear to modern readers. This obscurity had led commentators to suggest all kinds of proposals as to what this means. I prefer one of the following:

- 1) Robbing temples might refer to diaspora Jews who neglected to send in their yearly temple tax (some foreign governors even forbid them from sending money back). In **Exod 30:13**, the Jews are required to pay a tax for the Temple of half a shekel in accordance with the annual temple tax. It says,

*Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel as an offering to the LORD.*

So, Paul might be poking at Jews who said they hated idolatry in *any* form but failed to support *true* worship in the Temple.

- 2) Robbing temples might also refer to Jews who plundered pagan temples and then profited from them by using the metals or precious treasures for their own wealth.

This practice, however, was condemned in **Deut 7:25**. It says,

*The carved images of their gods, you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for*

*yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.*

So, this Jewish man says he hates idolatry, but he finds himself drawn to gain from looting pagan temples. That is likely what Paul means when he says, “robbing temples.”

- **But, secondly, Paul directly answers the question in verse 23 by quoting scripture. Look at verse 24.**
- **Condemning scripture (24)** –<sup>74</sup> *For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*

Paul’s accusation against this Jewish man has scriptural warrant. In verse 24, Paul quotes **Isa 52:14**. In that chapter, the people of Israel suffer under oppression from Assyria and Babylon, in exile far away from their land. So, Isaiah explains the source of their oppression—it was their transgression.

So, Paul uses that text to point out how the transgressions of the Jewish people led Gentiles to mock the name of God.

- Now, it might be that Paul has some very specific acts of disobedience in mind that brought disrepute to God because of the disobedience of the Jews.
- It is a matter of fact that all Jews were deported from the city of Rome in 49AD for 6 years.
  - There was something about their behavior that drove them out of Rome.
  - Now, most scholars and historians suggest that it was because of their constant bickering and arguing over whether Jesus was the Messiah.
  - One ancient writer, however, points to **riots** that also occurred as the climax of **Jewish** fights against Christians.<sup>74</sup>
  - So, **Jewish stealing and looting and rioting (robbing of temples?)** might have been other scandalous reasons that Claudius deported all Jews from Rome just seven years before Paul wrote Romans.

Regardless, Paul is saying that Gentiles blaspheme God’s name *because of* the wickedness of the Jewish people. The Jewish people think they are something—they have a special name and book and knowledge and discernment and light—but they **steal** and **cheat** and **rob**, dishonoring God’s name among the Gentiles. And, men and women, this is unthinkable because we exist “for the sake of His name!” **Do you remember that from Romans 1?**

There is a huge gap between **their perception and reality!**

- **Boasting in circumcision (25–29)**

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<sup>74</sup> Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII* 7.6.15–16.

But there is one other area of Jewish pride that Paul saves for the conclusion. He's already popped the balloon of God's law and now he destroys their false confidence in God's sign. The Jewish people had a mark in the flesh that declared to everyone else that they were God's people. Their special sign was circumcision.

***Let's proceed through the text in its three parts.*** In each section, Paul considers how a different category of people relate to circumcision. This is the interpretive key for this whole paragraph.

- **Jews and circumcision (25)**

First, Paul considers two scenarios involving Jews and circumcision in verse 25. For simplicity's sake, let's consider both scenarios like a math problem.

- **Scenario 1: Circumcision + Jewish obedience = value (25a)** – <sup>25</sup> *For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law,*

In the first scenario, Paul considers when a Jewish man is both circumcised and obeys the law. **Read verse 25a.**

When a Jewish man obeys the law of Moses, then circumcision is indeed of value. Now, Paul does not tell us how much value it had for the Jewish people, but that it retained value for a Jewish man as long as he was actually obeying the law.

- **Scenario 2: Circumcision + Jewish disobedience = uncircumcision (25b)** – *but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.*

In the second scenario, Paul considers when a Jewish man disobeys. **Read 25b.**

When a Jewish man disobeys the law, then his circumcision becomes uncircumcision. Now, this idea would be a way for Paul to say “that transgressing the law has the effect of invalidating one's circumcision.”<sup>75</sup> A Jewish man who transgresses the law becomes just like a Gentile pagan.

- **Gentiles and circumcision (26–27)** – <sup>26</sup> *So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?* <sup>27</sup> *Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.*

Next, Paul considers Gentiles and circumcision in verses 26–27. **Let's read them.**

Paul begins by suggesting that an uncircumcised man—a Gentile—might keep the “precepts of the law.” **But what does that mean and who is this Gentile?**

- Well, those are hard questions, but Paul's consistent vocabulary helps us.
- The phrase behind “the precepts of the law” (τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου) is used only one other time in Romans.

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<sup>75</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Guide*, 199.

- In Rom 8:3–4, Paul says that Jesus came to defeat sin in the flesh so that the “righteous requirement of the law” (τὸ δίκαιωμα τοῦ νόμου) might be fulfilled in us who walk according to the Spirit.
- So, “the precepts of the law” might be translated “the righteous requirements of the law.”
- So, it seems that Paul is speaking of *many* Gentiles converted through the gospel to live lives that conform to the righteous requirement(s) of the law (*the moral requirements that the law intended*) through the enablement of God’s Spirit.

Next, in verse 27, Paul adds that these Gentiles who produce what the law intended through the Holy Spirit’s enablement will condemn Jews who have the written law (*written code is a way to understand the law as written on tablets of stone*), but who do not obey it. This is how a physically uncircumcised Gentile might condemn a Jewish person.

- **True Jews and internal circumcision (28–29)** – <sup>28</sup> *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*

That leads Paul to one final consideration in verses 28 and 29. Finally, Paul describes true Jews and *internal* circumcision in verses 28 and 29. **Let’s read those verses.**

In these final verses, Paul considers what truly makes a Jewish person and he makes his point in both a negative and positive way. Outward marks do not make anyone a *true Jew* (v. 28). *Outward* circumcision alone does not accomplish this!

Instead, *internal* obedience and *internal* “circumcision of the heart” by the Spirit of God is necessary (v. 29). Let’s consider this a bit more closely by answering two questions.

- **First, what is a circumcised heart?**

In the OT, several passages spoke of the heart as being circumcised or uncircumcised.

- For instance, concerning Israelites who sin but come back to the Lord, **Lev 26:41b** says, “If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob.”
- In **Deut 10:16**, Moses appeals to the Jewish people for the need to metaphorically cleanse their hearts. He says, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”

So, a circumcised heart was a heart that turned from its iniquity and was no longer stubborn, but clean.

- **Second, how does someone get a circumcised heart?**

But let's answer one more question in Romans. **Second, how does Paul say someone gets a circumcised heart?** Paul says that a circumcised heart comes by the Spirit and not the letter. The Holy Spirit is the agent. This kind of clean heart does not come through the letters of the Law of Moses (written law); instead, the Holy Spirit metaphorically cuts our heart to produce a heart that brings the praise ("approval") of God. It is the Spirit who changes hearts like this. ***This reminds me of a parallel passage from Paul in 2 Cor 3:5–6.***

*<sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

Changing hearts is the new covenant work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

Now, we ask again, "why?" ***Why would Paul write this while addressing the Jew?***

- In writing this, Paul says that true Jewishness depends on what God sees in your heart and not the externals.
- Paul deflates Jewish presumption in the ceremonial sign of circumcision.
- It will not deliver them *because* God only approves those with clean hearts.
- And, men and women, this is what God is still looking for in our world today.
  - God will not be looking for external things.
  - Something that you have done (*good works, baptism*).
  - Something that you think makes you different, unique (*heritage*).
  - No, God will be looking for a clean heart and the only way one gets a clean heart is through His Son, Jesus Christ.
  - Consider a text later in Romans:

*<sup>9</sup> For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

## 2) Correcting possible misunderstandings (3:1–8)

In Romans 1–3, Paul considers how the wrath of God comes on all human beings because of their sinfulness and unfaithfulness to God. At the beginning of this passage, Paul sets the agenda for these chapters. Rom 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

- The condemnation of humanity started with Gentiles and their refusal to acknowledge or worship God, but, instead, they worshipped and served themselves (1:18–32).
  - In response, God gave them over to *dishonorable passions* like homosexuality and lesbianism *and to debased minds*, so they engage in all manner of evil and wickedness and unrighteousness and applaud those who rebel against God.
- But then, Paul turns his attention to the condemnation of the Jewish people (2:1–29).

- He makes his case against the Jew by imagining a normal Jewish man.
- This man boasts in his possession of the law and in his physical sign of circumcision as a young boy might think that his possession of two balloons makes him better than everyone else around him.
- More specifically, the Jew thinks that the law and circumcision exempt him from the condemnation that God will bring down on Gentile sinners.
- But Paul argues that Gentiles who *actually* keep the law *and* have circumcised hearts will 1) condemn the Jews who disobey the law *and* 2) receive their praise from God.
- The net effect of Paul's arguments deflates all the sources of *Jewish* presumption and pride.

As we come to the first few verses of Romans 3, we come to a very difficult text! It's the sort of passage that gets more difficult the closer you look at it! Tom Schreiner declares that "knotty problems lie under the surface" of this passage, making it *quite* difficult to understand.<sup>76</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones said that it is the hardest passage in Romans and one of the hardest in the Bible. Even Simon Peter suggests that sometimes Paul is hard to understand (*read 2 Pet 3:15b–16*). Peter, however, says that it is the ignorant who fail to understand him!

So, let's dig in, asking God to reveal himself to us through this portion of scripture.

***Let's start by reading the whole thing!*** If you are physically able, I ask you to stand with me as we read God's Word. *This is the Word of the Lord.*

Let me give you a tool to understand this passage that I think opens it up!

- In Rom 3:1–8, Paul continues his diatribe against his *Jewish* opponent, this time, however, he has the imaginary opponent talking.<sup>77</sup>
- That is, this passage contains objections to what Paul says about the Jews *and* answers from Paul.
- Paul has two people arguing back and forth in the text—***Paul*** and ***his debate partner***.

Knowing this, should really help us!

Now, some scholars (*Stott and Moo*) suggest that Paul's imaginary opponent might be someone like Paul when he was a Pharisee.<sup>78</sup> So, they say, it's Paul the Pharisee vs. Paul the Christian. Instead, if you look at verse 8b (*as some people slanderously charge us with saying*), it seems that Paul's imaginary opponent is talking the way some real Jewish people spoke about Paul. Consequently, it's better to think of this imaginary opponent like the Jewish men and women

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<sup>76</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 147.

<sup>77</sup> Thielman says, "Now, in 3:1, for the first time this constructed debating partner talks back." Thielman, *Romans*, 163.

<sup>78</sup> Stott writes, "In fact we would probably not be far from the mark if we were to conclude that Paul's interlocutor is Paul himself—Paul the unconverted Pharisee, expressing attitudes Paul remembered so well as having been his own! In this way, Paul the Pharisee and Paul the Christian are in debate with each other, as in Philippians 3." Stott, *Romans*, 95. So, also Moo: "Remembering Paul's own rich Jewish heritage, we might even regard the dialogue as one between Paul the Jew and Paul the Christian." Moo, *Romans*, 101.

that Paul reasoned with in synagogues as he proclaimed the gospel.<sup>79</sup> It's Paul the Christian vs. the Jewish Skeptic.

The next hard question involves knowing **when** the Jewish opponent or Paul are speaking in the text. It seems to me that the paragraph contains four sections that move from 1) the opponent's double questions to 2) Paul's double answers in every section *except* the last where Paul quickly swats away the final objections with one answer (v. 8c; *their condemnation is just*).<sup>80</sup> So, it is four double questions and three double and one simple answer. Normally, the double questions come in 1 verse and the double answers come in the next verse.

Now, there is one more important observation that I want to point out to you about this paragraph. ***The questions or criticisms of Paul and his gospel are actually criticisms of God.***

- This will become clear as we move farther and farther into the passage.
- When you start saying that all people (*men and women, boys and girls*) are condemned and that some will be saved, it sometimes raises big questions about God.
- In our *sinful* desperation, we, at times, sound blasphemous and bring questions (*accusations*) not only against everyone else around us (*the wife you gave me; the serpent deceived me*), but against God himself.
  - Sometimes, when all other people to blame are removed, we point our finger at God.
- That is what happens in this passage, so much so, that Paul distances himself from the foolish and presumptuous way his opponent argues (v. 5b; *I speak in a human way*).

So, this passage will help those of us who have questions about a God who would condemn all men and women in their sin, placing them under His eternal wrath against sinners.

- We're sometimes uncomfortable with what we learn about God in Romans so we say things like: "He hates the sin, but loves the sinner."
- No! God does not send sin to hell. He sends sinners there as their just judgment for refusing him and making a god out of their own being (*self-autonomy; however, I identify myself is my authority instead of how God made me*).

Let's look at the passage by examining the four rounds of questions that Paul's opponent raises. It starts with Paul answering questions about *Jewish* advantage in verses 1 and 2. ***Read them.***

- a) **Answering questions about Jewish advantage (1-2) – <sup>1</sup> Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.**

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<sup>79</sup> "It seems more probable that he is reconstructing the actual arguments which Jews has flung at him during his synagogue evangelism." Stott, *Romans*, 95.

<sup>80</sup> Harvey suggests this structure of the argument. He writes, "It consists of four double questions; each (except the fourth pair) is followed by a double answer." Harvey, *Romans*, 75.

The double questions about being a Jew and circumcision spring right from chapter 2 (see vv. 17a, 25a).<sup>81</sup> The debater wonders what advantage is left for the Jew after the way Paul deflates all his advantage.

Now, we might think that Paul's answer to Jewish advantage will be: "Well, frankly, not much!" Dodd said that the logical answer might be "None whatever!"<sup>82</sup> Instead, Paul answers in two ways.

- First, he says, "much in every way" (πολὺ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον). Although Paul has deflated their sources of Jewish pride, he acknowledges that they have many advantages.
- And then, he begins to list them, stopping after the first or most significant advantage that the Jewish people hold over Gentiles.
  - Now, the expression, "To begin with" (πρῶτον μὲν) could be translated "first of all," *normally* signaling that an author has several things he's going to articulate in a list.
  - Paul never finishes, however, because he feels that this one advantage is so significant that there is no need to list others.
  - This is the preeminent privilege of the Jews and Paul wants to highlight it even if he neglects other privileges.

The Jews were all entrusted with "the oracles of God" (τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ).

- The oracles of God were the words of God.
- The greatest advantage that the Jewish people had as compared to the Philistines or Egyptians or Assyrians or Babylonians was that they had the "word of God."
- Do not dismiss this quickly!
- This is the first and only advantage that Paul feels the need to bring up.
- They were within earshot of the Word of God.
- They had it read to them all the time.
- The greatest advantage that anyone might have is the ability to have or hear the Word of God.
- ***Do you have any idea how advantageous it is for you to hear the Word of God and to have the Word of God?***
  - We have the opportunity to hear God's word opened Sunday mornings, and in Bible studies, and in Equip classes, and through personal study.
  - Yet, some of us are as excited about the preached word as we are of the stewardess's message to us on a plane.
  - Some of us just are not interested in *additional* Bible studies or classes with others because we prefer *really* anything else (*early lunch, snuggling up to your phone or a movie on the couch*)!
  - Some of us are as excited about the word for devotions as we are of reading the list of ingredients on our cereal box in the morning.

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<sup>81</sup> David Abernathy points this out. He writes, "Since in chapter 2 he has just argued that one can be a true Jew without an ethnic connection and be truly circumcised without the physical rite, he now poses the question that would logically arise about whether there is any advantage to being an ethnic Jew or physically circumcised." Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 212.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Cranfield, *Romans*, 177.

- Now, when I start preaching like this, I sometimes get charged of “legalism,” but I do not care if it is through *our* ABS or Equip, I just ask—“Do you love the Bible?” “Do you love Bible studies?”

May God give us a desire to devour his Word. May He help us to understand the powerful means of grace that has been given to us in the Holy Word of God.

I had a basketball coach who got the most out of us! He would often tell us: “***You gotta want it.***”

- Do you want it?
- Are you eager to hear God’s Word?
- Do you have any idea how advantageous it is for you to hear God’s Word when so many people in the world cannot?

The Jews excelled all other people in the entire world *because* they had the words of God, and, men and women, we have an *even* more complete edition of God’s word—Old and New Testament. We are privileged! And to whom much is given, much more will be required!

- Dig in! Want it!
- *These* are the oracles of God!

**b) Answering questions about God’s faithfulness (3–4) – <sup>3</sup> What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup> By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”**

But, next, the Jewish debater turns to questions about God’s faithfulness. ***Let’s read verses 3 and 4.***

He asks, “What then?” “If some did not believe, will their faithlessness nullify God’s faithfulness?” Here Paul’s opponent acknowledges that the Jews were unfaithful in their covenant with God but asks whether that means God will not fulfill his obligations to them.

- Will God bless Israel according to the terms that he offered to them?
- Will he be unfaithful to fulfill the promises that He has made to them?

Well, Paul’s answer is strong. It could not be stronger!

- He starts with “by no means (μὴ γένοιτο)!”
  - This expression in the original is an emphatic negation!
  - It’s hard to reproduce in English, so translations try “God forbid” (KJV), “Absolutely not” (CSB), “May it never be” (NAS).
  - Paul saves this expression for when he’s answering a ridiculous question, including ten times in Romans!<sup>83</sup>
- To this, Paul adds, “Let God be true even if that means that all human beings are liars.”

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<sup>83</sup> See Rom 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor 6:15; Gal 2:17; 3:21; 6:14.

- I think that the idea here is concessive: “God is to be seen as true even if all men must then be viewed as liars.
- Paul will have more to say about the speech or tongues of men in the next passage (*Rom 3:13–14*); here, however, Paul emphasizes that God is true, speaking not only of the fact that he is honest, but that he is true to his word.
- When the phrase “the truth of God” is used in the OT, it emphasizes God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel.
- He is reliable or trustworthy.
- He comes through on his promises.

Now, speaking of the Old Testament, Paul grounds his high view of God’s trustworthiness in the Scripture with a quotation of Psalm 51:4 at the end of verse 4.

- Paul quotes the LXX version of this verse almost word for word.
- Now, this psalm is perhaps ***the greatest penitential psalm of confession*** in all the Bible.
- It’s the one that we read in our scripture reading this morning.
- In the psalm, David confesses his grievous sins of adultery and murder in his affair with Bathsheba.
- Early in the passage, David cries out to God to be cleansed *and* washed and for God to blot out his transgressions.
- Then he declares that his sin was against God himself so *that* God is right when he speaks and blameless when he judges.
- Because of his sin and his impending judgment, David does not want anyone to think that God is unrighteous to judge him.
- God is blameless when he judges even the king of the Jews, David.
- Here is *the Jew*—the king of the Jews—and he sees God as righteous when he judges him for sin.

That appears to be Paul’s thoughts too. God is blameless (*he prevails, triumphs*) when he judges sinners. God is not unfaithful or unreliable when he judges his people who sin.

**c) Answering questions about God’s *righteousness* (5–6) – <sup>5</sup> *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* <sup>6</sup> *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?***

So, Paul defends God’s faithfulness in verse 4, but his opponent is not done questioning God’s character. More specifically, he goes after God’s inherent righteousness<sup>84</sup> or his righteousness in judgment<sup>85</sup> in verses 5 and 6. ***Let’s look at those verses.***

The double questions are: “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?” and “Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?”

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<sup>84</sup> Many commentators suggest that this is God’s inherent righteousness. For example, see Naselli.

<sup>85</sup> For example, Stott, Moo, and Schreiner argue that “God’s righteousness” is his righteousness in judgment.

- The imagined objector begins by questioning a Pauline premise about how man's unrighteousness highlights the righteousness of God.
  - It seems to me that he understands something that Paul actually believes—the darkness of human unrighteousness makes the brightness of God's righteousness shine greater.
  - A few years ago, I gave the illustration of the jeweler who placed Carissa's diamond engagement ring on a black velvet cloth.
  - When he did that, I was sold! I had to have it!
  - The dark backdrop made the diamond shine brighter!
- But the debater twists Paul's understanding about human unrighteousness accenting God's righteousness and asks: "Is [then] God unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?"
  - The argument goes like this: *Is God acting unrighteously if he punishes people who are actually enhancing his reputation?*

Well, pointing the finger at God is too much for Paul! So, he distances himself immediately with **a parenthetical apology**. He says, "I am speaking in a human way."

- From Paul's perspective, this last objection is disrespectful and out of place.
- "God's judgment is not something that may be called into question."<sup>86</sup>
- He knows that questioning the justice of God is absurd!
- It's the reckless use of reason.
- By the way, this is how men and women think **when** they've lost all sense of reality—**when** God's given them over to debased minds and dishonorable passions.

Next, Paul adds his answer in verse 6.

- He starts with "By no means" (*Absolutely not; Do not even think about it!*).
  - Now, men and women, it is not wrong to ask big questions about God in a *genuine* effort to learn more about him.
  - But we must be **very** careful that we are not blaming God when we do or accusing him of doing wrong!
  - Remember, He is the potter, and we are the clay.
  - May Paul's warning found later in Romans instruct us (*Rom 9:20–21*):

<sup>20</sup> *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"* <sup>21</sup> *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?*

- Do not ever say, "I cannot believe in a God like that!"
  - We can say, "I cannot believe in a God like you have portrayed."
- But, when reading the Bible, we cannot say, "I cannot believe in a God like that!"

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<sup>86</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 99.

- Do not play games with your theology *and twist* scriptural truth to fit something that you would approve!
  - When trying to win theological arguments, we sometimes try to put God in a box that does not conform to scripture.
  - Then, Paul closes his answer in verse 6 **with his own question**.
  - He explains that if the Jewish objector is correct that it would be unrighteous for God to judge *Jewish* disobedience, then God could not righteously judge *any* disobedience.
  - Paul knows that every Jew would hold the premise that God is the judge of the world.
    - For instance, they would be very aware of Gen 18:25 where Abraham talks about the “judge of the whole earth doing what is right.”
    - They know the judge of the whole earth is God.
    - That premise is found in the Law and other passages all throughout the Law and the Prophets speak of God judging the world.
    - So, Paul asks how God could judge the whole world, in accordance with the Law, if the Jews are exempted.
- d) **Answering questions about condemnation and doing bad things (7–8)** – <sup>7</sup> *But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* <sup>8</sup> *And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

So, the Jewish opponent points the blame at God—his faithfulness and righteousness in judgment, but he is not quite finished! He ends *personally* by asking about “my lie” and asks “why am I” being judged. **Let’s now consider verses 7 and 8.**

The debater asks two final questions here. He asks: “But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?” and “Why not do evil that good may come?”

With these two questions, the imagined opponent extends his critique of his understanding of Paul’s gospel to the extreme.

- “Paul, your gospel teaches that Jews are thoroughly and utterly sinful and condemned with no advantage and that this serves to highlight God’s righteousness in judging sinners.”
  - “But that is too radical!”
  - “It’s too pessimistic!”
  - It’s not like our theologians who are optimistic about us and believe that the Jews are exempt” (see *Philo*, for instance).
- “And your theology that everything abounds to God’s glory (including lies) is off.”
  - “If the Jewish person who lies should not be condemned as a sinner because his lie enhances God’s glory (3:7), then people should simply expand this principle and do bad things so that good things happen as a result.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 171.

- If *everything* glorifies God in some way or another, why not let it fly!

Well, Paul's answer is clear.

- These last accusations of his gospel are not something that only the imaginary opponent suggests.
- This is what Paul's heard in situations when some Jewish people *slander* him.

So, Paul responds!

- The people who take things this far and say that I argue for something that encourages lying or doing bad things are ridiculous and experience a just condemnation!
  - "Their condemnation is just."
  - Paul is done arguing!
    - Later, Paul deals with someone who thinks that he can sin so that grace might abound (see *Romans* 6).
    - Now, he just swats away the accusation *and* claims that these *Jewish* people who 1) reject his gospel *and* 2) project outrageous caricatures on his belief will be justly condemned.

### c. The condemnation of all people (3:9–20)

In the opening chapters of *Romans*, Paul clearly charges that Gentiles *and* Jews face God's wrath because of human sinfulness.

- He started with the sinfulness of **the Gentiles** who engage in all kinds of vices like those listed and described in *Romans* 1:18–32.
- After that, he turned all his attention to **the Jewish people** in *Romans* 2.
  - They boast in advantages like 1) possession of the Torah and 2) the rite of circumcision, but they are outdone by Gentiles who have neither but obey God from circumcised hearts.

In *Romans* 3, Paul keeps his focus on the Jewish people when he interacts with an imaginary Jewish opponent in the first eight verses.

- Paul has experience interacting with *argumentative* Jews in synagogue after synagogue around the world, so he answers odd objections to the gospel and finally swats away their line of thinking entirely in verse 8.
- He's done arguing—"Their condemnation is just!"

That is when we come to the final section of the bad news that all humanity is under God's wrath.

- In *Rom* 3:9–20, Paul continues addressing Jewish people and, by the end, demonstrates how God holds all humanity accountable for their sin.
- In the passage, Paul reasons like a prosecuting attorney who has a case to make against all mankind.
- He issues an opening statement (v. 9), presents damning evidence (vv. 10–18), and makes his final statement (19–20) before resting his case entirely.

- His case is so solid that, by the end, his opponents are speechless.
- Their mouths are stopped!

So, let's dig into this text. We will consider verses 9–18 today and leave verses 19–20 for our next time in Romans.

First, Paul issues an opening statement in verse 9. **Let's read that.**

- 1) Paul issues an opening statement: “All are under sin” (9).** <sup>9</sup> *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.*

The beginning of verse 9 should sound familiar. The two opening questions of verse 9 are quite similar to what Paul asked in verse 1. He considers again what advantage the Jewish people have. Although the questions *are* quite similar, the answers are opposite. In verse 1, Paul says that their advantage was “much in every way,” but here the answer is “None at all.”<sup>88</sup>

**So, how can Paul have it both ways?**

- Well, it seems best to suggest that Paul considers different kinds of advantages with his questions in 3:1 and 3:9.
  - Romans 3:1 addresses advantages related to their Jewish heritage.
  - Romans 3:9 deals with advantages about being judged by God.
- That is, Paul's answers are like this: “Although you have historical advantages regarding knowledge of God's will and relationship to him (3:1–2), you do not have advantage regarding responsibility and accountability for sin (3:9).”
- That is where Paul is going!

Now, the reason Paul says the Jewish people are at no advantage is explained with—“for we have already charged that all, both Jewish and Greeks, are under sin.” Paul has already accused or “charged” (προητιασάμεθα) that *all people* are “under sin” (ὕφ' ἁμαρτίαν) in Romans 1–2.

- Here Paul personifies “sin” as a force or a “cruel tyrant who holds the human race imprisoned in guilt and under judgment.”<sup>89</sup>
- John Stott says, “Sin is on top of us, weighs us down, and is a crushing burden.”<sup>90</sup>
- It pushes us down in an unrelenting, merciless way!
- The main idea here is that all are under sin.
- The word “sin” speaks not only of our failure, it is a tyrant!
- We are all under the power or control of sin.
  - *Every human being is under sin's power.*

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<sup>88</sup> The answer could be “not completely” or “not absolutely instead of “absolutely not.” Many commentators and translations take it as a strong negation—an emphatic refusal.

<sup>89</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 99.

<sup>90</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 99.

- And this is not a new reality that Paul has created!
- This has been true since the Fall in the Garden!
- Now, Paul's pessimism is unusual among Jewish writers during his time.
- Other Jewish writers, like Philo, are optimistic about the ability of men and women to do good.
- They believed in **universal human goodness**.
- This is also how many people today view humanity as well.
  - They claim that humanity is basically good.
  - Psychologists claim this as well.
  - This is what you'll likely hear in your anthropology class at ODU or JMU as well!
  - But Paul says—the Word of God says—that human beings are universally and thoroughly sinful.

Now, after this opening charge or accusation that sin is over all of us (*we are all under it*), Paul presents his supporting evidence and the evidence is overwhelming. He has overwhelming scriptural proof that all people are held under the grip of sin. **Let's take a moment to read all the evidence in verses 10–18.**

## 2) Paul presents damning evidence (10–18).

Paul does not stop with accusation, he proves it. In these verses, he quotes six passages from the OT that prove the utter depravity of all human beings. **Notice, the amazing way that Paul does this!**

<sup>10</sup>As it is written: “None is righteous,” (Ecc 7:20)

“no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Psa 14:2–3)

<sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” (Psa 5:10)

“The venom of asps is under their lips. <sup>14</sup>Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” (Psa 9:28)

<sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known.” (Isa 59:7–8)

<sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Psa 35:2)

This is an amazing section of scripture. I wrote the entire first chapter of my Phd dissertation on it and I found it difficult to wrap it up in one chapter! Paul joins many texts together in a scripture chain—a catena—a massive composite citation of scripture from six different sources to prove that we are all under sin. He does this often at the end of an argument to clinch it—to seal the deal—to close out—so that no one can argue against him without feeling that scripture is on Paul's side.

Now, a modern reader might wonder 1) why Paul gives so much support and 2) why he apparently joins together so many random OT passages. But these texts are not random or unnecessary. Paul combines the texts together in an orderly and strategic way to leave a profound impact on the reader.

So, I want to consider these citations in the way that Paul arranges them so that we can grasp how the scripture testifies to the sinfulness of human beings. It seems that the quotations are organized to make three points about humanity.<sup>91</sup>

- a) **We are universally and thoroughly sinful (10–12).** <sup>10</sup> *As it is written, “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*

The first point is a general although important. In verses 10–12, Paul combines passages together that demonstrate that we are *universally and thoroughly* sinful.

Paul appeals to a written authority—**the** written authority. Then he lists out what scripture says:

- *None is righteous* (οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος) – First, he says, “None is righteous.”
  - In this first section, five out of seven lines start with the word for “none.”
  - When Paul does not start a phrase with that he says, “all” or “all together.”
  - Consequently, Paul describes something here that is extensive, including every person. No one is excluded; all are included.
  - More specifically, Paul quotes a passage that merges Ecclesiastes 7 and Psalm 14 together to say that a righteous human being does not exist.
  - That is, no one among fallen human beings meets God’s righteous standard.
  - To make his case crystal clear, Paul injects a part of Psalm 14 to this phrase: “not even one” (οὐδὲ εἷς).
  - There are no exceptions among fallen humanity!
- *No one understands* (οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ συνίων) – Then, Paul adds a series of descriptions from Psa 14:2–3 to close out his first, general condemnation of humanity in verses 11–12.
  - It begins with “no one understands.”
  - This description means that fallen human beings are not able to come to “an intelligent grasp of something.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Various proposals have been put forward regarding the structure of Rom 3:10–18. Consider the following four proposals: 1) Two-part proposal: This catena divides into two parts—one about “human rejection of God” and the other about “human violence toward others” (Seifrid, “Romans,” 616). 2) Inclusion proposal: Douglas Moo proposes that there is an inclusion at the beginning and end of this section. Colin Kruse writes: “Moo, *Romans*, 202, identifies the following structure in Paul’s catena: ‘The first line (v. 10) is the heading of what follows, with the last line (v. 18) coming back to the same themes in an inclusio. Verses 11–12 develop the first line with a series of five generally synonymous repetitions of the theme “there is no one righteous,” all introduced with “there is no,” and with a reference to “all people” breaking them up in the middle (v. 12a). The next four lines (vv. 13–14) describe sins of speech, each line referring to a different organ of speech. Verses 15–17, on the other hand, focus on sins of violence against others.’” Kruse, 165–66 (fn 290). 3) A strophe structure: “Michel sees a strophe structure—vv 10–12 (2 x 3 lines), vv 13–14 (2 x 2) and vv 15–18 (2 x 2)—which is hardly self-evident. More impressive and effective is the sixfold repetition of οὐκ ἔστιν (vv 10, 11, 12, 18; cf. Heil).” Dunn, *Romans*, 145. Cranfield follows a proposal for three strophes as well. See Cranfield, *Romans*, 193. Cranfield suggests how the catena reinforces Paul’s argument. He states that the three strophes appear in 10–12, 13–14, and 15–18. These sections declare 1) the universality of sin generally, 2) the sinfulness of human *speech*, and 3) the violent and murderous *acts* of humanity. 4) Verse 18 gives a reason view: Schreiner presents verse 18 as giving a reason why none are righteous (10), why all have turned away from God (11–12), sinned in their speech (13–14), and injured fellow human beings (15–17). The reason is “because they do not fear God (18).” Schreiner, 161.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey, *Romans*, 83.

- The object of the understanding is not explicitly stated, but it seems that human beings are at a cognitive deficit to understand God's high and righteous ways.
- 1 Cor 2:14 says, "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."
  - Mankind *is not able* to process the spiritual significance or importance of things around them unless the Holy Spirit helps them.
  - These things are only spiritually discerned/appraised.
  - We need the Spirit to help us *even* understand these things let alone receive them.
- Paul says, "No one understands."
- No one seeks for God (οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν) – He adds, "No one seeks for God."
  - This is an intriguing description.
  - We like to talk about those who seek after God but maybe do not have opportunity to hear about Jesus.
  - Instead, this text tells us that no one seeks after God.
  - We might take this further to say that the only person who seeks after God for genuine reasons is the one who is responding to God's seeking of him.
  - Now, there is an illustration that we often use to describe man's efforts at seeking God or pleasing him.
    - The **bridge tract** uses a chasm and pictures human effort.
    - This tract has humans trying to get to God through their own efforts.
    - Some men get five feet, some ten, some 15, but no one makes it the whole way!
    - Although that tract illustrates that no human works can get someone to heaven, we might need another tract for Romans 3.
    - This tract does not have men jumping, but a dead man on the ground or a stack of corpses with no ability at all.
    - Or, if anything, the man is going the exact wrong way as the next phrase says, "all have turned aside!"
    - But let Paul's statement in Rom 3:11 stand—No one seeks after God!
      - We want to allow for some people who seek for God in their innocence.
      - We do not want to think that it could be this thorough!
      - But Paul says, "No one seeks after God."
- All have turned aside (πάντες ἐξέκλιναν) – This quote means that mankind has deserted the way, everyone has gone the wrong way. We deliberately turn away from God and the paths that He would have us take.
- Together they have become worthless (ἅμα ἡχρεώθησαν) – Next, Paul quotes scripture to say that "together they have become worthless." The word "together" (ἅμα) shows that there is no exception to this rule—"to a man they are corrupted."<sup>93</sup> The word

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<sup>93</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 103.

“worthless” (ἡχρεώθησαν) is used of things like milk that go sour.<sup>94</sup> The human race is rancid! Every human being is spoiled entirely.

- *No one does good, not even one* (οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ποιῶν χρηστότητα, ἕως ενός) – Finally, Paul ends the first wave of quotes by saying “no one does good, not even one.” The point is clear: We are universally and thoroughly sinful.

This is true, men and women, not only of others or outsiders, it is true of me. It is true of you! So, look around for a moment. What do you see? That is right—sinners! Then look in the mirror every morning and what do you see? Sinner.

That is Paul’s general rule—we are universally and thoroughly evil. Some even here just cannot understand this, they cannot accept this! You say, “You think that all of us are sinners—all of us are evil in ourselves.” And their problem is that they are far away from truly understanding the infinite holiness—the holy perfection of God. Our biggest problem is that God is so good! You say, “Why is that a problem?” Well, it’s a problem because you are not!

But then Paul takes things to a different level and gets more specific in verses 13–14. **Let’s read them.**

- b) We are corrupt in our inner beings and speech (13–14).** <sup>13</sup> “*Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.*” “*The venom of asps is under their lips.*” <sup>14</sup> “*Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.*”

After Paul’s first very thorough picture of our depravity in verses 9–12, he proceeds to talk about how depravity shows itself in our speech.

Notice that there are four key terms that Paul uses to portray the depravity of our speech: **throat, tongues, lips, and mouth**. The order of these terms is deliberate and purposeful. **What do you notice about the order of these terms?** They are listed in this way to reproduce the sequence of organs involved in producing speech, with the final word being a summary description of the whole process.<sup>95</sup> Paul considers what proceeds from the heart through the throat to the tongue to the lips—our mouths.

So, let’s look at each expression quickly:

- *Their throat is an open grave* (τάφος ἀνεωγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν) – First, the scriptures say that the throats of all human beings are “an open grave.”

While the overwhelming point of verses 13 and 14 is the corruption of human speech, this first description also pictures our inner corruption.

- Paul compares what comes out of the interior of human beings to the stench of opening up an ancient grave.

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<sup>94</sup> For an explanation of how this means going sour like milk, see Thiselton, *Romans*, 103.

<sup>95</sup> “The order of the quotations may intentionally reproduce the sequence of organs involved in producing speech: throat—tongue—lips—mouth.” Moo, *Romans*, 203.

- We have all experienced “bad breath” in one way or another, but this metaphor of powerful.
- What comes out of us is filthy, stench!
- They use their tongues to deceive (ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιοῦσαν) – We also use our tongues to deceive—to flatter with lies.
- The venom of asps is under their lips (ἰὸς ἀσπίδων ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτῶν) – And the “venom of asps is under our lips.”
  - The asp is a repulsive reptile.
  - The fangs of the snake ordinarily lie foiled back in the upper jaw of the snake, until the snake strikes.
  - When that happens, the hollow fangs drop down to inject poison into the victim.
  - This metaphor describes how our speech harms other people.
  - So, the lips of humans are like fangs that inject poison on others.
  - What a powerful condemnation!
- Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness (ὧν τὸ στόμα ἄρᾶς καὶ πικρίας γέμει) – Finally, Paul summarizes everything he’s been saying about the speech of human beings: “their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” The word “full” indicates that it is not occasional curses and bitterness that come out, but that depravity is pervasive in the speech of men and women.

You see, we hurt so many people with our mouths, even so many of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. Our tongues follow well-worn paths of lying and slandering and yelling and cursing and bullying with our mouths. We heap sin on sin with our mouths and often injure the ones we claim that we love the most! Maybe we have done this in our homes this week and justify it because it is just our brother or sister or spouse. May God help us! We hurt people we have covenanted together with in marriage and in church.

- No wonder **James**, the brother of Jesus, said what he did about the tongue in James 3. Listen:

*<sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup> Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and is set on fire by hell.*

- This is perhaps, why **Jesus** himself said, “It is not what goes into a man that defiles him, it is what comes out of him.”

Men and women, our mouths are full of curses and bitterness. Listen, I have been teaching through Paul’s last canonical letter—**2 Timothy**.

- This book was written just before Paul’s death.

- In the book, he warns Timothy about the last days and gives him a vice list of sins that people will demonstrate.
- The list contains 18 sins, and all of those can be demonstrated not only through our fingers, feet, and fists, but also through our tongues.

So, it comes from within and goes out through our lips, we are filled with sins in our speech, but Paul is not yet done. In verses 15–18, he continues his citation of OT texts that prove our sinfulness. This time he considers the sinful acts of human beings. **Let's read them.**

- c) **We are corrupt in our acts (15–18).** <sup>15</sup> “*Their feet are swift to shed blood;* <sup>16</sup> *in their paths are ruin and misery,* <sup>17</sup> *and the way of peace they have not known.*” <sup>18</sup> “*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”

In this final section of OT texts, Paul turns his attention from words to deeds/actions ranging from how we use our feet to how we use our eyes.

- *Their feet are swift to shed blood* (ὀξεῖς οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν ἐκχέαι αἷμα) – Verses 15–17 are quotations of Isa 59. This significant chapter is one that Paul returns to time and again because it strikingly depicts God discovering that there is no righteousness in the entire world. So, when Paul thinks of the corrupt deeds or actions of men and women, he thinks of Isaiah 59. This text teaches that the feet of fallen men and women pick up pace when they find opportunity to take life or inflict violence. Paul is saying that there is something fundamentally wrong with our hearts. We injure and hurt others. You say, “Well, we are not really that way in America today!” We hear about tribal Civil war in Sudan and think that would not happen in our civilized world. But I say, “Really?” “Do you really want to say that?” “Have you watched the news?” Do you know why we do not kill each other more than we do? The answer is the police—prison—the death penalty. Do you know what would happen if we took these things away—law enforcement, the just punishment of government (*bearing the sword*)? If you took these things away, we would loot and steal and beat and attack and defend and kill. It's such a thin line—a line that God has established to keep man from man. Take that away and see how safe you feel! Paul says, “Their feet are swift to shed blood.”
- *In their paths are ruin and misery* (σύντριμμα καὶ ταλαιπωρία ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν) – So much so, that wherever we go we ruin things and make people miserable. Ruin, misery, and destruction follow us. Paul is describing the misery that we inflict on others. Employers inflict employees, husbands inflict wives, parents inflict children and then invert it in every scenario! Ruin and misery are in our paths!
- *The way of peace they have not known* (καὶ ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν) – And we do not even know a peaceful way. That is what is missing in the wake of fallen men and women—peace, true peace, genuine well-being.
- *There is no fear of God before their eyes* (οὐκ ἔστιν φόβος θεοῦ ἀπέναντι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν) – Finally, “there is no fear of God before their eyes.” “To say that there is no fear of God before his eyes is a figurative way of saying that the fear of God has no part in directing his life, that God is left out of his reckoning, that he is a practical atheist.”<sup>96</sup> It is our natural fallen impulse to exclude God from our calculations altogether.

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<sup>96</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 195.

Well, that is the damning evidence from Scripture that supports the idea that “all are under sin.” There is no little part of us that is righteous! We have broken every one of God’s laws. We are thoroughly corrupt! That is the bad news! We are all under sin! Has that sunk into you? That is true of all men and women, boys and girls around us! Believers, are you fighting sin through the power of God’s Holy Spirit? Are you cooperating with him in sanctification? May God help us understand how thoroughly sin held us and how much we need Jesus to be rescued from such universal sinfulness.

### 3) Paul makes his final statements (19–20).

This morning, we will deal with a biblical passage that succinctly states the nature of God’s future judgment of humanity. ***Please turn in your Bible to Rom 3:19–20.***

If you were to ask your unbelieving neighbor whether he will ever be accountable to God for his actions, his answer might take different forms.

- **Some neighbors would likely try to deny the existence of God and thus any accountability to him for how they live their lives.**
  - Romans 1, however, notes that they *do* clearly know that God exists.
  - Deny it as they will, their conscience and creation bear witness to them that there is a God.
- **Others, who believe that there is a God, will likely think that they will somehow make a case that they should be accepted by him.**
  - Maybe she believes that she will be able to present all the ways that she’s helped others in her life.
  - Or maybe he thinks that in that day he will compare himself to others who make the news for their egregious crimes of embezzlement, abuse, rape, assault, or murder.

Regardless, make no mistake about it, according to scripture, every person *will* appear before God’s judgment. Further, men and women, this biblical text gives a very clear and different picture of what judgment “in God’s sight” will be like.

- Instead of arguing or reasoning with God about our conduct in this life, this text argues that all human self-justification and explanation will be silenced.
- No human being will escape the chair of God’s judgment and no person will be justified by his works.

It will be our simple goal this morning for you to see this for yourself from scripture and to motivate you to warn others that no human escapes the judgment chair of God. ***You see, men and women, what the scripture demands will one day shut every human mouth and hold every person accountable because no one will be justified by obedience to the demands of holy scripture.***

Now, in Rom 3:9–20, Paul makes his case about *universal* sinfulness. He has already considered the condemnation of Gentiles (1:18–32) and Jews (2:1–3:8) but now he gives a summative argument that condemns all humanity.

In these verses, Paul argues like a prosecuting lawyer who starts with 1) an initial statement (v. 9), 2) presents condemning evidence (vv. 10–18), and 3) makes his final statement (vv. 19–20). The last time we were together, we considered all the damning evidence (*we are universally and thoroughly corrupt, we are corrupt in our inner being and speech and hearts and eyes and feet*).

The case is so convincing and extensive, Paul’s final statement is incredibly short, establishing only two points in verses 19 and 20. **Let’s look first at verse 19 to learn that the law shuts everyone’s mouths.**

**a) The scripture’s demands will shut every mouth (19).** <sup>19</sup> *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

Now, the point that Paul is making in verse 19 is that the *law* holds everyone accountable before God and will shut everyone’s mouth in the future judgment. But let’s look more closely at how he makes this point. The verse is actually more difficult to interpret correctly than it might at first seem.

One of the keys to understanding this verse is to identify who Paul is talking about when he describes “those under the law” (τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ).

- Now, this should be more accurately translated “those in the law” or “those in the realm of the law.”
- Paul is talking about those people “in the law’s realm or sphere of influence.”
- Now, there are only two possible answers regarding who “those in the realm of the law” refers to.
- It’s either 1) only Jewish people or it’s 2) all people.

To answer this question, one needs to determine to what law Paul refers.

- In verse 19, Paul has the law speaking (*he makes a person out of it*) to those in its realm of revelation.
- Now, the word “law” (νόμος) here can refer to the law code of Moses or more generally to scripture.
- That is, sometimes Paul uses the word “law” to refer to the Law of Moses or the whole OT.

- Look with me at 1 Cor 14:21 for a moment. It says,

*In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.”*

- Now, do you see the quotation marks found in our translation and the introductory formula?
- Paul is quoting from the OT.
- But do you know from what passage or book of the OT he is quoting?
- Well, the answer is Isaiah—Isa 28:11–12.
- But where does he say he is quoting from?
- That is right—the Law.
- When quoting from the “Law,” Paul quotes from Isaiah—a book not found in the Pentateuch or directly about Moses’s law.

- So, Paul can use “law” to refer to the whole of Scripture and that is what I believe that he is doing in verses 19 and 20. **[Read those verses again and substitute “scripture” in place of “law.”]**
- Paul is referring to how the scriptures—including the Law, Writings, and Prophets—speak to those in its realm of influence.

Now, you *should* ask: **“Why do you believe that?” “Why should I read it that way?”** Well, it is a difficult question and good people disagree on its answer, but there are a few factors that push me that way.

- **First, Paul’s just been quoting many verses from the OT that demonstrate that all humanity is under sin. [Review a few of them]**
  - But did you notice how many of those came from the Mosaic law code or from the Pentateuch specifically?
  - Well, the answer is none.
  - All those verses came from Psalms and Isaiah and Ecclesiastes.
  - You see, after quoting from the Writings and the Prophets, Paul can talk about the law (“Scripture”) speaking to those in its sphere of influence.
- **Second, it seems more likely that Paul intends the Scriptures generally here because he has it stopping every mouth and holding the whole world accountable to God.**
  - It’s more likely that Gentiles, who did not have the Law of Moses, are held accountable by the whole of Scripture than only Moses’s law.
  - In these verses, Paul is placing Gentiles in the realm of God’s law found in scripture.

Now, we can come to Paul’s true meaning and intention in verse 19. Paul has scripture speaking to everyone under the influence of its revelation in such a way so that what scripture says shuts every mouth! Paul foresees the day of the final judgment when *every mouth is stopped*.

What an amazing statement this is in scripture! If all we had to consider was what we know in this fallen world, we might think that this was impossible!

- When it comes to one’s religion or autonomy, everyone has something to say!
- It is extremely rare (*maybe impossible!*) to find someone who does not justify or defend his choices even if many others think that he is wrong!
- The bold and loud excuses and justifications of human beings today is so disheartening that it is not hard to imagine some of these people pointing their finger right in the face of God in the final judgment, asking who He is to judge them.
- But, men and women, that is simply not how things are going to be!
  - Even if all fallen humanity bands together to protest against God, in this final judgment, the case will be so strong, no one will say anything! Imagine a judgment like this!
  - When the case is so strong—the weight of the evidence is so heavy—that the defendants cannot say anything—they are speechless.

***You see, what the scripture demands will shut every human mouth and hold every person accountable to God.***

I remember getting into trouble when I was six years old in grade school. I went to a little Christian day school in Clymer, PA called Calvary Baptist Academy. I was acting off in the bathroom with some other boys, making fun of someone. When I went out into the hallway, however, my teacher said that she would need to talk with me. Her name was Mrs. Wright and she was no one to mess with. After the class got back to the room, she asked me to remain in the hallway. I knew what she wanted to talk about and I thought that I would somehow talk my way out of it. Instead, she told me that she had heard every word of the conversation and that our school administrator, Jeff Bailie (6'7") had as well. After she was done, I had nothing to say. I was wrong and I was sure it was just a matter of time until my parents would be brought into the loop as well.

At the future judgment, every mouth will be shut and every person will be accountable to God.

- b) Obedience to scripture's demands will justify no one (20).** <sup>20</sup> *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Now, in verse 20, Paul takes things a bit further in his final judgment to explain why the demands of scripture ("the law") will silence everyone. ***Let's read it.***

The reason why the whole world will be accountable to God and will have their mouths shut by the scripture's (law's) demands is because God will justify no human flesh (σάρξ) on the basis of "works of the law" (ἔργων νόμου). But we need to slow down a little when we consider this phrase as its place in Romans and this verse is very important.

- First, I point out that this phrase—two words in the original—"works" and "law"—are found nowhere in the Bible or outside the Bible other than in the writings of Paul.
- Paul uses the phrase eight times—twice in Romans (3:20, 28) and six times in Galatians (2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10).
- Now, this phrase is surprisingly controversial among interpreters, especially among those who hold a "new perspective on Paul."
- Having said this, we should note that the phrase is used by Paul ***as a contrast*** to faith as the means by which justification takes place (Gal 2:16 [3x]; 3:10; Rom 3:20, 28) or in other cases of the means by which people receive the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2, 5).<sup>97</sup>
- I agree with Andy Naselli who says that "works of the law" are a subset of "works" in general—no human being will be justified or will receive the Holy Spirit by works of any kind at all.<sup>98</sup>
- So, Paul refers simply to the works that the law (the whole OT) commands.
- No one will be saved on the basis of their obedience to scripture because he or she cannot observe these demands as God's infinite perfection and holiness demand.

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Thielmann, *Romans*, 190–91.

<sup>98</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 49.

***You see, what the scripture demands will one day shut every human mouth and hold every person accountable because no one will be justified by obedience to the demands of scripture.***

Now, Paul gets this theology from the Holy Spirit and from the scriptures. More specifically, in **Psalm 143:2**, David wrote, “Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.” To this Paul adds only “by works of the law.”

Yet, Paul gives a different reason why “works of the law” will save no one at the end of verse 20. The reason no flesh will be justified by the law is because “through it comes knowledge of sin” (διὰ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας). But what is that? What is the knowledge of sin?

- Well, the law not only defines and delineates sin so that we know it intellectually, it also helps us know sin *personally*.
- You see, “As we fail to attain to the demands of God presented in the law, we recognize ourselves to be in bondage to sin’s power and justly condemned as sinners.”<sup>99</sup>
- The more we become aware of God’s rules, the more we break them.
- Paul will explain more about how the law provides us knowledge of sin in Romans 7 (*note the words law, knowledge, and sin in 7:7–12*).
- The point here, however, is that the law does not justify; it actually only increases sinfulness.

So, to the person—our neighbor, friend, co-worker—who thinks that he will be able to compare his life to another or earn God’s approval through his works, Paul’s final statement has a clear warning:

***What the Holy scriptures demand will stop your mouth at God’s final judgment and obedience to those demands will not save you. You need righteousness apart from the law or works—you need someone else to save you! You need Jesus!***

May God help us tell our neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers that this week! No one gets away. No one talks their way out of it. Only shut mouths will be at God’s chair of judgment! Only those who believe in His Son will be saved.

## **2. A righteousness that saves in Jesus Christ (3:21–31)**

***Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 3:21.*** We will consider verses 21–26—one sentence in the original. Now, it is difficult to overstate the significance of this one sentence.

Listen to the voice of some who have looked closely at this passage:

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones (*pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for 30 yrs*) exclaimed, “There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words, ‘But now.’”<sup>100</sup>

C. E. B. Cranfield (*British theologian; classic 2 vol commentary on Romans*) wrote, “We may go farther and say that it is the center and heart of the whole of Rom. 1:16b–15:13.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 263.

<sup>100</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 221.

Donald Barnhouse (*pastor at Tenth Presbyterian Church for 30 yrs and founder of the “Bible Study Hour”*) super-inscribed a heart over these verses in his Bible because he was: “Convinced today, after these many years of Bible study, that these verses are the most important in the Bible.”<sup>102</sup>

J. I. Packer (*Canadian, evangelical theologian, author of “Knowing God”*) said that this passage contains “the atlas that carries the whole of the Christian faith on its shoulders.”

Martin Luther (*the great Reformer who struggled intensely with this passage until he was converted*) called it “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.”<sup>103</sup>

Finally, Leon Morris (*former great Pauline scholar; Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne*) said this “is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”<sup>104</sup>

These men strive to outdo each other in their accolades for this passage. So, let’s stand together to read this passage and ask God to help us understand it. **Read Rom 3:21–26.**

Now, such a significant sentence helps us answer a thorny theological question. People often struggle with the question: **How can God be both just and merciful at the same time?** That is, **how can God forgive any sinner and maintain His character?**

Imagine a mass murderer standing before a judge ready to be sentenced. The judge goes through all the charges and says, “You are guilty of all these murders over and over again and the law requires that you pay the ultimate sentence which is death, but I am in a good mood today (or there is some insignificant loop hole here), so I am going to let you go free.”

- What do you think of that kind of judgment? What do you think of that kind of judge?
- Well, if you are the guilty murderer, you like him (*at least until someone comes after you!*).
- If you are the parent of a victim, however, you cannot believe it!
  - You ask and beg and appeal that this is not right!
  - How could any judge let someone like this go?
  - No, in such cases, we demand justice and will not tolerate any mercy.

***But what if God decides to let a wicked sinner go? How can that be?***

Today, we will consider a passage that defends God’s character in both judgment and mercy. You see, although God *does* justify sinners, he is just because of the unique sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.

In the last few weeks, we have considered Romans 1–3 to understand that God’s righteousness is against all ungodliness—the ungodliness of Gentiles and Jews—all humanity. Because God is righteous and we are not, we are all under wrath. No human being will be able to work to earn his

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<sup>101</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 199.

<sup>102</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans*, 82.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 218.

<sup>104</sup> Morris, *Romans*, 103.

deliverance and in the end every mouth will be shut and the whole world will be accountable to God. That is the bad news!

But things change significantly in **Rom 3:21**. From *Rom 3:21–31* Paul describes the appearance and implications of God’s saving righteousness found in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Today, we will consider the appearance of God’s saving righteousness in verses 21–26.

**a. The appearance of God’s saving righteousness (21–26)**

God’s righteousness is manifested (21–22a), given (22b–25a) and defended (25b–26) by Paul in this passage.

- 1) God’s righteousness manifested (21–22a) –<sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.***

“God’s righteousness manifested” is found in verses 21–22a. **Let’s read them.**

It’s been some time since we have seen “the righteousness of God” in Romans. When we looked at Romans 1:16–17, we took time to consider it. More specifically, we saw that God’s righteousness involves 1) **who he is** and 2) **what he does** (*whether in judging or saving*). That is, God is righteous in his character *and* in his action. We can then talk about God’s *inherent* righteousness or his *saving* or *judging* righteousness.

Having recalled that, Paul makes three quick points about God’s righteousness in these opening verses.

**a) God’s saving righteousness did not come through the law (21a).**

First, God’s *saving* righteousness does not come through the law.

- In contrast to all the bad news that dominates the scene of human history, Paul says, “but now” (Νυνὶ δὲ) God’s righteousness “has been manifested” (πεφανέρωται).
  - This verb comes from one word in the original.
  - It means “to reveal or make known.”
  - The word is passive, however.
  - So, it is not that God reveals his own righteousness in this sentence, but that someone or something else reveals or makes known God’s righteousness.
  - We will learn more in the next verse as to what Paul believes reveals God’s righteousness.
- Before we see that directly, however, we see what did not reveal it—“the law.”
  - God’s saving righteousness is “apart from law” (χωρὶς νόμου).
  - We have already considered a few ways that “law” can be used in Romans. It can be used of 1) the Pentateuch, 2) Scripture, or 3) the Mosaic law code.
    - Here, Paul probably refers to what he’s said about “works of the law” in the previous verses to talk about the commands of Scripture or more specifically to works done which are commanded in the Mosaic law code.

- In other words, God’s saving righteousness does not come through Moses’s law or obedience to it.
- The decisive act that brought God’s saving righteousness was not the law or works of the law.

**b) God’s saving righteousness was predicted in the OT (21b).**

Yet, it is also true that God’s saving righteousness was predicted by the Law and the Prophets. Here Paul talks explicitly about the OT Scriptures.

- Although the Mosaic law code did not bring God’s saving righteousness, the OT scriptures did predict it.

Earlier, we have considered some of the OT texts that spoke in advance of God’s saving righteousness in our sermon on Romans 1:16–17. Here, however, we note that Paul sees the OT pointing forward to the righteous way God would save sinners.

**c) God’s saving righteousness is through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (22).**

Yet, there is one more important point that Paul makes at the beginning of verse 22 about the manifestation of God’s saving righteousness.

Although God’s saving righteousness does not come through works of the law, it comes “through faith in Jesus Christ” or “through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).<sup>105</sup>

- Does Paul believe that God’s saving righteousness is revealed by the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ”—in his life, death, and resurrection—or is it revealed through the faith of those who believe in Jesus Christ?
- Now, it is actually quite difficult to know which is right here *because* Romans 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 clearly emphasize that justification comes through a believer’s faith not his works, but the second half of Romans 5 emphasizes how justification is fundamentally possible solely on the basis of one man’s act—the death of Jesus on the cross.

Regardless, the text clearly makes the point that God’s *saving* righteousness is manifested not in the Law of Moses but in Jesus and such righteousness is only enjoyed by those who believe. It seems to me that while the law could not bring God’s saving righteousness, Jesus Christ did. The main point of these verses is that God’s *saving* righteousness is revealed in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>105</sup> The interpretation of this phrase is a battlefield between protestant Christians and proponents of the new perspective on Paul. N.T. Wright and James Dunn suggest that the phrase speaks of the faith or faithfulness of Jesus. Moo and Schreiner disagree, suggesting that the normal protestant interpretation is better. Although agreeing with the protestant doctrine of faith alone, I find the arguments for the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to be compelling. Paul is saying that the law did not bring God’s saving righteousness, but that Jesus’s death on the cross did. Romans 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 emphasize how justification comes through a believer’s faith, but Romans 5 demonstrates how justification came through the act of one man, Jesus Christ. Both are true. Justification comes through the act of Jesus and through a Christian’s faith not his or her works.

Next, we will learn that God's *saving* righteousness redeems any sinful human who believes in Jesus. I call this second point—God's righteousness given (vv. 22b–25a). **Let's read them.**

- 2) God's righteousness given (22b–25a) –** *For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

Andy Naselli declares that God's righteousness is not only who God is and what he does, it also speaks of "what God gives."<sup>106</sup> That is the underlying truth of this passage, but Paul goes a different direction at the beginning. He starts by saying there is no distinction—difference—among humans when it comes to sin and justification.

**a) All people need God's saving righteousness (22b–23).**

Regarding sin, Paul says that without distinction, all have sinned. "Everyone, without distinction, needs God's righteousness because everyone, without distinction, has sinned."<sup>107</sup> Now, Rom 3:23 might be speaking of all humanity sinning in the sin of Adam in the garden (*like Romans 5 will later establish*), but it is probably better to see this verb as a gnomic or summary verb.<sup>108</sup> This "refers to the sins of all people through the past viewed as in a single moment."<sup>109</sup> Make no mistake about it all human beings are sinners.

As a consequence of sin, we also are always falling short of God's glory. At creation, humans were sinless, image-bearers who enjoyed Divine glory. We were able to reflect God's glory perfectly, be completely conformed to his image, and enjoy the inherent glory of God. But now, we are always falling short of the divine glory.

So, without distinction, everyone has sinned and is falling short of God's glory.

**b) All people can have God's saving righteousness as a gift (24–25a).**

Regarding justification, however, Paul says that without distinction, all are justified only by God's grace in Jesus Christ. That is where Paul goes in verses 24 and 25a.

More specifically, Paul tells us how "all ... are justified" in these verses. **How?** *Look at verse 24 again.* It is "by his grace." **How?** "As a gift." **How?** "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Paul keeps answering this one question in different ways to emphasize that God's saving righteousness is "a gift" (δωρεάν). Our sinless, perfect God stooped to help fallen, sinful, weak human beings by giving us a free gift, something that demands no payment from us, and this was only possible through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. I want to take a

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<sup>106</sup> Naselli, "Romans," 54.

<sup>107</sup> Thielmann, *Romans*, 205.

<sup>108</sup> Stanley Porter believes that the aorist verb is gnomic, meaning that all people always fall short of God's glory. See Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 38–39. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 187 and Moo, *Romans*, 226.

<sup>109</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Guide to Romans 1–8*, 273.

little time here to consider what Paul specifically says about this free gift of God through Jesus in the end of verse 24. This requires us to focus on two Christological truths.

- **Redemption (v. 24b)**

Although this gift is free to us, it involved a price identified in this passage with the word “redemption” (ἀπολυτρώσεως).

- Redemption is “a commercial term borrowed from the marketplace.”<sup>110</sup>
- At this time, it often “referred to the ransoming of prisoners of war, slaves, and condemned criminals.”<sup>111</sup>
- We were like condemned prisoners, but Jesus paid the price to buy us back. Sinful human beings can be justified through the redemption—the ransom price—paid by Christ Jesus.

- **Propitiation (v. 25a)**

But Paul continues to describe Jesus in verse 25. More specifically, he explains that the free gift of God’s saving righteousness in Jesus involves God “publicly displaying” (προέθετο) Jesus “as a propitiation” (ἱλαστήριον).

Now, this word is quite difficult.

- The English word “propitiation” is not a word that we use every day.
- Try to come up with a synonym for that! There are not many!
- The word means “to appease someone’s anger.”
- Now, this concept is not very popular today as people do not like to think of God as someone whose anger or wrath must be placated.
- They think this is an unworthy concept to picture God, but Paul’s point here is that God’s zealous, burning wrath against sin must be appeased. It must be satisfied.

Now, the word that Paul uses is a special, technical word that was normally used in the OT to speak of the mercy seat on the altar in the Tabernacle or Temple.

- This golden lid on the altar was the earthly place where God met with Moses and Aaron and priests.
- It was the place where forgiveness was offered to humanity through the bloodshed of the sacrificial animals.
- Paul uses this word to portray Jesus as “the place where God accomplished the ultimate propitiation.”<sup>112</sup>
- That is, when Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood, God’s wrath was satisfied.
- God’s wrath was poured out on him and thus God’s anger was placated in Jesus.
- The cross is the place where God and people meet and where men and women can be forgiven for their sins!

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<sup>110</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 113.

<sup>111</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 229.

<sup>112</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 55.

The means by which Jesus becomes a propitiation is “by faith in his blood” (διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι).

- So, God’s saving righteousness is a gift for *any* sinful human who believes in Jesus.
- We can do nothing else to be saved.
- This is the most important thing that you will ever hear!
- *Any* sinner can be safe from God’s wrath and judgment through faith in Jesus’s shed blood on the cross.
- Not faith plus anything!
- Faith—belief in Jesus, the Son of God.

The songwriter says it so well:

*Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to Thee for dress. Helpless, look to Thee for grace. Vile, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

But this is where we run into a problem! *Any* wicked sinner can be forgiven if he or she believes in Jesus. To return to our opening illustration, *even* the mass murderer who turns to Jesus can be justified by God in the final judgment.

To make this problem more explicit, I want you to turn back to **Prov 17:15**. This verse says, “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.” Now, I want to draw your attention to this first part a bit more. God says, “He who justifies the wicked . . . [is] an abomination to the LORD.”

***So, what is the problem? Well, is not that what God does in the gospel?***

Consider **Rom 4:5**: “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” God is the one who “justifies the ungodly.” Do you notice the problem? God condemns what He later does in the gospel!

- ***So, how can God be so merciful and yet maintain his justice?***
- ***If God is righteous and if all his actions are righteous, how can he make sinful people righteous?***

Well, that when we consider Paul’s defense of God’s saving righteousness in verses 25b–26. ***Let’s read them.***

- 3) God’s righteousness defended (25b–26) – *This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.***

Finally, we come to God’s righteousness defended. In this final section, Paul talks about God demonstrating his righteousness in Jesus. That is what he wants to talk about! He says it twice—“to show God’s righteousness” (εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) and “to show his righteousness” (πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) in verses 25 and 26.

Now, the word “show” is only found in one other place in Paul’s writings—2 Cor 8:24—and there it is always translated “proof” or “show the proof.”

- Consequently, Paul suggests that God sent Jesus into this world to “prove” or “to show the proof” of something about God—His righteousness.
- Somehow, Paul considers that people might question the justice of God.
- Something brings God’s justice into question.
- So, Paul shows how Jesus’s work **proves** or **defends** God’s righteousness.
- John Piper says Jesus **vindicates** God’s righteousness on the cross.

Now, there are three things to learn in these final verses.

#### a) The reason God offers justification in Jesus (25b)

First, in the final phrase of verses 25, we see the reason God offered justification in Jesus. It says, “Because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”

- Paul suggests that something had brought God’s justice into question.
- In God’s divine patience, he had been passing over sins.
  - **Whose sins?**
  - Well, it’s the sins of all OT saints.
  - The sins of Abraham, Moses, David, and thousands and thousands of sinners among the people of Israel.
    - How could God forgive these people?
    - How could God forgive an adulterer and murderer?
    - How could God forgive liars and abusers?
    - How could God pass over their sins and leave them unpunished?
    - Well, it wasn’t on the basis of the blood of bulls and goats that could never take away sin!

God had been overlooking sins and forgiving sinners in anticipation of something that could take it all away! That is the reason he sent Jesus! Some critics could suggest that the Judge had no sufficient grounds to save so many sinners. That is, until Jesus died for them on the cross!

#### b) The timing of justification in Jesus (26a)

That leads us to the timing of justification in Jesus in verse 26a. Paul says that he sent Jesus to prove his righteousness “at the present time” (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ).

- This could literally be translated, “In the now time.”
- Frank Thielman says, “Christ’s death was the critical moment in history when God proved himself to be just.”<sup>113</sup>

God sent Jesus at the appointed time, the climactic moment, to prove His own righteousness.

#### c) The purpose for God offering justification in Jesus (26b)

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<sup>113</sup> Thielmann, *Romans*, 212.

Finally, we see the purpose for God offering justification in Jesus in the final phrase of verse 26. I love this phrase. **Let's read it:** "So that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

In this passage, we have the ultimate objective of God offering justification in his son, Jesus. God offered *saving* righteousness through His own divine Son so that he might not only be just (*inherent justice*) but also be "the justifier" of sinful men and women who put their trust in Jesus. The little word "and" can show coordination—two divine purposes, but it also can be concessive. If that is the case, then God offers justification in His own divine Son so that He is just *even when* He justifies sinners.

You see, the only way God's justness, holiness, and wrath could be satisfied is if his wrath was poured out on someone. And that someone was the very son of God in human form—Jesus Christ. The only just way for God to justify the unjust is for God the Just—Jesus Christ—to save us from his wrath. In this way, the godhead remains just while also justifying us from self-sacrifice.

You may be here today thinking that there is no way that God could forgive you. Perhaps, you feel that there is just too much drunkenness—too much anger—too much lust—too much internal hatred.

- But God tells you today, "Believe in my Son." That is it!
- God says to you, "If you trust in my Son, I will be just and the justifier of the who trusts in my Son."
- You might feel so stained by sin, but I tell you that before you exit this morning, you can be washed and cleansed, having God's wrath completely appeased—God's anger completely satisfied with no more punishment to pay.
- You can be redeemed and be considered as righteous as Jesus himself, if you simply put your trust in Jesus who died on the cross for you.
- "If you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you can be saved" in this very moment!
- Will you do that today?

#### **b. The incentives for God's saving righteousness (27–31)**

Sometimes people's actions make us question their motives.

Maybe we see or hear a report of what someone did, but we need to know more. In our current political climate, we regularly hear about some new conflict or dispute between people that we have never met before and there is regular pressure for us to make judgments about who is right and who is wrong.

- Now, sometimes, it *might* be possible to hear or see the dispute and make *an immediate decision* as to who is right and who is wrong because of the obvious moral violation of another's rights or safety.
- Most times, however, we are wise to ask more questions if we feel compelled to draw conclusions in the matter.
  - We might ask:

*“Can I trust this media source?”*

Or we can ask: *“What actually happened? What kind of evidence is there to demonstrate who was in the wrong?”*

- If we can answer these questions, at least one more important question should be considered:

*“Why? Why did the person act or respond in that way?”*

Understanding one’s motives can make all the difference in the world. *Was she defending herself? Is there more to the story than the brief video clip that I see?*

This morning, we will consider a passage where Paul unfolds why God acted the way that he did in justification.

- More specifically, we learn *why* “justification by faith in Jesus” matters.
- Of course, Protestants trumpet the importance of *sola fide*—justification “by faith alone.”
- So, we know that it must be important.
- This morning, however, we will consider a *Biblical* passage where that question is answered.

The aim of our sermon is to show you how justification by faith in Jesus matters *and to remind you* of the fundamental heart attitude that it requires. There is no higher or better way; there is no other way for people to be saved and for all of God’s redemptive purposes to be accomplished. It is by faith in Jesus and is so for many reasons!

In the previous passage (Rom 3:21–26), Paul unfolds the densest, most theological sentence about the “gospel” anywhere in the Bible. If you remember, we read quotes from scholars and pastors who were outdoing one another with their accolades for this passage. God justifies not on the basis of “works of the law,” but “faith.” Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross defends God’s character in showing mercy. Although God *does* justify sinners, he remains just because of the unique, sinless, perfect, sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.

In our passage this morning, Paul brings things to clear, practical conclusions. More specifically, in verses 27–31, he uncovers four divine incentives for justification by faith. Paul debates an imaginary opponent through diatribe—posing and answering questions—to make his final conclusions clear. In doing so, Paul follows a pattern of asking a question or two before giving an answer. *Look with me at how the text is arranged:*

- He answers the first and the last questions simply—one simple question and one simple answer (vv. 27a–b; 31).
- The second and third sections have double questions before answers and supporting arguments (vv. 27c–28; 29–30).

Now, each of these “question and answer” sections make an argument. In my opinion, each section gives one of God’s incentives for justifying by faith in Jesus Christ. So, let’s look at the first one together. ***Look with me at the beginning of verse 27.***

***Justification by faith matters because ...***

- 1) It destroys human boasting (27a–b).** <sup>27</sup> *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.*

The argument is ... justification by faith matters because it destroys human boasting. In Paul's debate, he starts with a question.

**a) Question (27a) – <sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting?**

The question begins “then” or “therefore” (οὖν). Paul is drawing a conclusion about justification by faith. So, he asks: “What becomes of boasting?”

Now, to fully grasp the nature of the question, we must understand what Paul means by “boasting” (καύχησις).

- The word “boasting” refers to demonstrating pride in one’s accomplishment.
- Pride is at the root of boasting *and* the root of almost all the sins throughout the world.
- Normally, because of the fall, we boast in self *because* we are proud.

By nature, we think that we can “establish a claim on God” *because* of *our* performance.<sup>114</sup> You see, it is possible for us to make anything a means of boasting. We *can* become proud of our prayers or preaching or singing. We can even be proud of our humility.

It is also possible for any man or woman to be proud. **Spurgeon** said it so well: “There may be as much pride inside a beggar’s rags as in a prince’s robe; and a harlot may be as proud as a model of chastity. Pride is a strange creature; it never objects to its lodgings. It will live comfortably enough in a palace, and it will live equally at its ease in a hovel. Is there any man in whose heart pride does not lurk?”

Consider, how the scriptures warn against pride:

- Prov 27:2 – Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips.
- Prov 18:12 – Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.
- Prov 16:18 – Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.
- Prov 26:12 – Do you see a person wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
- Prov 8:13 – Pride and arrogance ... do I hate.
- Prov 15:25 – The Lord will destroy the house of the proud.
- Psa 101:5 – Whoever has a haughty look and a proud heart I will not endure.
- Jer 50:31 – “Behold, I am against you, O proud one,” says the Lord God of Hosts.

These are just a few of the hundreds of verses against pride.

Yet, in Romans, Paul considers what happens to human boasting when justification comes through faith.

**b) Answer (27b) – *It is excluded.***

His answer is short. Boasting is “excluded” (ἐξεκλείσθη).

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<sup>114</sup> Cranfield uses this language. See Cranfield, *Romans*, 218.

- This verb is used only one other time in the NT of what false teachers were trying to do to the Galatians believers.
- They wanted to isolate them from Paul and other believers.
- That is, they wanted to shut them off completely.

So, Paul says that human boasting is shut off entirely because God's *saving* justification comes by faith.

- The point is simple and clear but let me cite a good explanation of it.
- Frank Thielman says, "Because human deliverance from sin and divine wrath is a matter of trust in God and his free gift of atonement in the death of Christ, no room is left for human boasting."<sup>115</sup>
- You see, one of God's incentives for doing things in this way is to stop boasting.

The verb "excluded" (ἐξεκλείσθη) is passive—a divine passive. This is something God does to us!

- He shuts off any ground for human boasting in sending His Son to deliver us.
- You see, we have nothing to offer to God except our filth and mess!

And, men and women, may this be one of our fundamental, daily convictions!

- After failure, we should avoid saying, "This is not me." "I am not like this." "You know me better than this!"
- Well, yes, you are!
- Yes, we are.
- It's only the Spirit's work that can cause you to rise above!

So, I ask: "Are you proud?" "What sin and strife is in your life, your relationships, this week because of pride?" "Do you speak or think of your own righteousness?" That is not gospel; That is anti-gospel! That is the sin that caused Lucifer to fall and the desire that led Adam and Eve to want to be like God. So, we should instead know that faith in Jesus eliminates boasting.

**2) It eliminates boasting in works (27c–28).** *By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.* <sup>28</sup> *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

Now, Paul continues to keep the focus on boasting in the second point as well. So, more specifically, justification by faith eliminates boasting in works at the end of verse 27 through 28. ***Let's look there.***

Here Paul gives a double question, a simple answer, and support.

**a) Double question (27c) – *By what kind of law? By a law of works?***

Behind the two questions in the middle of verse 27 is another implied question. It is: "How is boasting excluded?" Now, the way Paul asks it is: "By what kind of law? By a law of works?"

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<sup>115</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 213.

Now, we have already considered how the word “law” can be used in Romans.

- We have said it can be used three ways: 1) of the Pentateuch, 2) of Scripture, and 3) of the Mosaic law code.
- Here, we likely run into a fourth way: 4) of a rule, standard, or system of rules.
- In other words, it can be used of a system of laws generally—a set of laws.

So, he asks if boasting has been excluded through a system of law that relies on works.

**b) Answer (27d) – *No, but by the law of faith.***

Paul’s answer is no, but through a system of rules or laws that rely on faith. Paul sees the new covenant as based on faith.

**c) Support (28) – <sup>28</sup> *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.***

To support this, Paul says that “we” hold that justification comes through faith apart from or without works or deeds done as commanded in the Law of Moses. Paul talks here about what genuine believers think about how someone is justified. We are justified by faith alone and this prevents us from boasting in our own works.

So, all boasting in works is entirely eliminated. Perhaps, we should use Paul’s powerful words in **Gal 6:14** to wrap up this point about boasting in works. Paul says, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” May God help us to “put to death” our pride and self-confidence in our works.

**3) It demonstrates God’s universal lordship (29–30). <sup>29</sup> *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,* <sup>30</sup> *since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.***

That leads us to the third divine incentive for justification by faith in Jesus. In verses 29 and 30, we see that justification by faith demonstrates God’s universal lordship. ***Look there with me.***

**a) Double question (29a) – <sup>29</sup> *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?***

The double question is found at the beginning of verse 29. Paul knows that orthodox Judaism and Christianity agree in the conviction that God is not only the God of Israel but is the God of the whole world. As one commentator says, “God is not the god of a single ethnic group but the creator and judge of the universe.”<sup>116</sup>

**b) Answer (29b) – *Yes, of Gentiles also.***

So, the answer is “yes.” God is the God of the gentiles also.

**c) Support (30) – <sup>30</sup> *since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.***

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<sup>116</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 215.

As support for this answer, Paul gives a conditional clause in verse 30. It can be translated, “If indeed God is one, then He will justify the circumcised and uncircumcised by faith.” Paul states the condition in a way that invites his reader to agree with this basic Jewish and Christian belief in the oneness of God.

*Deut 6:4 – Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God, the LORD is one.*

*1 Cor 8:4 – There is no God but one.*

In Rom 3:30, Paul plays off the idea of God’s oneness to speak of His “sameness.” The one God of the universe treats all people the same when it comes to justification. God offers justification for everyone in the same way—“by faith in Jesus.” You see, from one God comes one way!

Consequently, “justification by faith in Jesus” matters because it demonstrates God’s universal lordship over the whole world.

- 4) It upholds the law (31).** <sup>31</sup> *Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

Finally, Paul closes with a simple question and answer in verse 31 to show that justification by faith upholds the law. **Let’s read this final verse.**

- a) Question (31a) –** <sup>31</sup> *Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?*

Paul’s final question involves how faith in Jesus Christ relates to the Law of Moses. Paul asks if it “overthrows” (καταρροῦμεν) the law.

- Now, this could mean “abolish” or “nullify” or “do away with,” but we must look at the nature of his answer to learn more about what specific nuance it carries.

That is because the word “overthrow” stands in antithesis to the word “uphold” in the answer.

- b) Answer (31b) –** *By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

So, Paul asks, “Does faith overthrow the law of Moses” and answers, “No way. One the contrary, we uphold the law.” Paul’s answer in verse 31 is simply stated, but it can be understood in a few different ways. Fundamentally, this means that believers in Jesus Christ somehow “uphold” the law of Moses instead of “abolishing” or “nullifying” it. **But how?**

Now, if you are familiar with what Paul says about believers and whether they are under the law of Moses in other passages, we might expect Paul to give a different answer. **Does faith in Jesus Christ abolish the law of Moses?** “Why, yes, it does!”

According to other places in Paul and the NT, the Law of Moses is “annulled, taken away, voided, abolished, destroyed, weak, obsolete, cast out, invalid, repealed, obliterated, eliminated, removed, replaced, nullified, abrogated, and ended. [Thus, we are] dead to, not

bound by, free from, redeemed from, liberated by death from, removed from, not ruled by, not keeping, not under, and apart from [the law of Moses]."<sup>117</sup>

The case is so strong, one scholar says "with only the slightest amount of hyperbole it would seem that every conceivable and available Greek term, legal or otherwise, that could be used to speak of the abolition and annulment of the Law of Moses was used. Had the word "kibosh" existed in the first century I have no doubt that the NT (*probably Paul or Hebrews*) would have used it to "put the kibosh" on the law of Moses."<sup>118</sup>

That is the answer we might expect here too, but Paul surprises. While we are not under the regulations of the Law of Moses or bound to obey its commands, we somehow "uphold" (ἱστάμεν) it. The word itself means to "establish" or "confirm" the law.

***So, how can we understand this?*** I see a few possible solutions. ***How does "justification by faith" do this?***

- ***It may be that we "confirm" the Law of Moses by obeying its moral demands.***
  - This idea, however, is never explicitly stated in the Bible.
  - It is a theological answer, but not necessarily a biblical one.
  - I think there are better answers!
  - I think Romans itself answers this question for us in different passages.
  - Consequently, I think the correct answer is two-fold.
- ***First, we "uphold" the Law of Moses through the sinless obedience and perfect righteousness of Jesus.***
  - "Christ fulfilled what the law commanded, so believers [uphold] the law because they are 'in Christ.'"<sup>119</sup>
  - ***Romans 8*** says it this way: "<sup>1</sup> There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."
  - By justifying people through faith in Jesus Christ, the Law is confirmed, established.
  - As we are "in Christ Jesus" and his perfect righteousness, we meet all the requirements of the law.
- ***Second, we confirm the Law of Moses by loving God and others through the power of the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling the whole intent of the commands of God given through Moses.***

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<sup>117</sup> Günther H. Juncker, "'To Abolish the Law': The Antinomian Vocabulary of the New Testament and Its Implications" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, GA, November 18, 2010), 2–3.

<sup>118</sup> Juncker, "'To Abolish the Law,'" 2–3.

<sup>119</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 60.

- If we keep reading in **Romans 8**, this becomes clearer. It says, “4 In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
- Later, in **Romans 13**, Paul says it this way, “8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- So, we uphold the law by loving others as followers of Christ!
- We do not abolish the law of Moses, but through the Spirit, we hit its target—Love!
- Jesus himself said that the two most important commands in the entire law were to love God and neighbor.

So, far from being abolished, the law is confirmed or upheld by believers being “in Christ” and demonstrating the law’s goal—love—through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Men and women, ***do you know what God has done in this passage?*** He has given us his motives. What an astounding privilege! What a blessing! Do not just write it down and forget about it. Do not say, “Oh, I wish he used more stories, more illustrations.” No. This is God opening up his mind to us!

So, we ask: “Why, God, do you justify by faith in Jesus?” And God smiles! “Well ...

- 1) It eliminates all human boasting. *We sang it: “Guilt, Vile, Helpless we...”*
- 2) It testifies to my universal lordship. *One God—one way.*
- 3) It *actually* confirms or establishes the law by believers being “in Christ” and loving others.

### 3. A righteousness that comes by faith: lesson from the Abraham story (4:1–25)

***Have you ever felt so overwhelmed with God’s grace that you broke forth in song or praise to God?***

Now, I do remember that I am in a Baptist church and that we are somewhat limited in our worship expressions! Maybe not quite so severely as our Presbyterian brothers! So, let’s ask our question about our private devotions! ***Have you ever been so overwhelmed by something that God has done for you that you shout or sing praise to God?***

This morning, we will study a passage where an OT author breaks into song, praising God for his blessings. The OT author is quoted by Paul in Romans 4. Now, the unapologetic aim of our sermon will be to motivate or challenge you to praise God for the blessing of being justified apart from works.

In Rom 1:18–11:36, Paul deals with his main theological motivation for Romans—the theological issue. He wants the Romans to fully understand the gospel.

- This lengthy section—the heart of Romans—includes the nature (1:18–4:25), power (6:1–8:39), and history (9:1–11:36) of the gospel.
- Regarding its nature, we have seen that it reveals a righteousness from God that is ... against all ungodliness (1:18–3:20) and that saves in Jesus Christ (3:21–31).
- Today, we will learn that righteousness is by faith (4:1–25).

We come to a chapter where Paul considers possible means of justification, beginning with three means that cannot do it—works (1–8), circumcision (9–12), and law (13–17)—before revealing more

about the only way one can be justified—by faith (18–25). We will consider the *false* means this Sunday and next and the *proper* means in two weeks.

Now, Paul continues his **question-and-answer format**, but changes things a bit by teaching these lessons through a skillful retelling of a story. He has covered some of these concepts before through discourse, now he teaches through the narrative example of Abraham. We can learn a lot through written principles and maxims, but we can also learn through example.

#### a. Abraham and works (1–8)

Paul begins his focus on “the Abraham story” by considering “Abraham and works” in verses 1–8. This section contains a question (v. 1), two possible answers (vv. 2–3), and two final conclusions (vv. 4–8).

##### 1) Question (1) – <sup>1</sup> *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*

His opening question about Abraham is found in verse 1. **Let’s read it.**

Paul’s opening question is posted to those who had Abraham as their forefather. While this might speak of all true believers in Jesus Christ, it might be that he posts this question to an imaginary *Jewish* man or woman—one who might think that justification comes through works of the law.

To this person, Paul asks what Abraham “gained” (εὕρηκέναι) in verse 1. Now, the ESV translation here is completely appropriate and conveys the sense of the Greek term pretty well. Other translations, however, might be clearer.

- I like how the CSB, NAS, KJV translate it. They ask what Abraham “found”?
- The NET and NIV take it as “discovered”?
- For those of you who know a little Greek, the word is εὕρισκω—a common word normally translated “found.”
- So, better, Paul asks what Abraham “found” or discovered’ about justification in his own life.

Now, Paul *might* intend to evoke a common phrase found often in the OT—“to find grace” (εὕρισκω χάρις).

- This phrase is found ten times in Genesis alone and multiple times throughout the rest of the OT as well.
- **Do you remember the first occurrence of this phrase?**
- Concerning Noah, in **Gen 6:8**, the Bible says, “Noah ‘found’ grace in the eyes of the Lord.”

So, Paul asks what Abraham “found” or “discovered” about justification. Was it *any* different than what Noah found?

##### 2) Answers (2–3)

That is when Paul posts answers to the question. He considers a wrong answer to what Abraham found and then the right answer.

- a) **Wrong answer (2)** – <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

The wrong answer is an idea that Paul considers for the sake of argument only to quickly refute it. **Look with me at verse 2.**

In this verse, Paul considers how *some* Jewish people reasoned about their forefather (προπάτορ) Abraham. He considers this wrong answer because he knows that some of his *Jewish* contemporaries *actually* believe it. They thought their great forefather, Abraham, was justified because of his own righteousness.

Consider the following evidence of this popular *Jewish* belief:

- Abraham was “perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life” (*Book of Jubilees* 23.10).
- “We find that Abraham our father had performed the whole law before it was given, for it is written, ‘Because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws [Gen 26.5]’” (Mishna *Kiddushin* 4.14).
- “You therefore, O Lord, that are the God of the just, have not appointed repentance to the just, to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who have not sinned against you; but you have appointed repentance to me, a sinner” (*Prayer of Manasseh* 89).

James Dunn says, “Within the Judaism of Paul’s day Abraham had long been lauded as, in effect, the prototype of the devout Jew.”<sup>120</sup>

So, Paul considers whether this is what Abraham *actually* found. **Was he perfect? Was he justified through his own obedience or works?** Well, Paul says *if* this were true, then Abraham would have something to boast about. The problem with that, however, is he’s just said that God justifies *by faith* to exclude or eliminate all human boasting (3:27). You see, no human being can boast about their own righteousness.

But Paul considers this wrong answer only briefly before putting a quick end to it. At the end of verse 2, he abruptly responds: “**But not before God**” (ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς θεόν). Paul cannot even let his imagination go there, let alone reality. He will not even consider this for more than two seconds! No one will have something to boast about before God!

**And, men and women, this is the biggest problem with the systems of religion in the world!**

- They all rest fundamentally on achieving justification with God on the basis of works and that imagines men and women someday standing before God declaring his or her works.
- This is the problem with **your neighbor** who thinks that his good deeds or goodness will allow him access to heaven.
- While his view of self is *wrong*, his view of God is *intolerable*.
  - Instead of reasoning with God about his own righteousness, he will be speechless like it says in Romans—“every mouth will be stopped” (3:19).

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<sup>120</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 226.

- Maybe he will fall like the great prophet **Isaiah**.
  - Do you remember when he saw God?
  - He saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up with the train of his robe that filled the temple... And he said, ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”
  - Not a lot of boasting there!
- Maybe he will be like God’s upright servant, **Job**, who finally got his face-to-face meeting with God.
  - He said, “I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”
  - No boasting in works here!

So, no one will stand before God and boast in his own righteousness!

**b) Right answer (3) – <sup>3</sup>For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”**

That is when Paul goes to scripture for the right answer in verse 3. To get the right answer about what Abraham discovered about justification in his own experience, Paul quotes scripture. What a great impulse! When Paul needs an answer, he brings scripture to bear. **Look with me at verse 3.**

In this verse, Paul proves from an OT text that God justified Abraham on the basis of faith instead of works.

- More specifically, Paul quotes **Gen 15:6 LXX**.
- This passage is an important one for NT authors and Paul uses it here to help us see what Abraham found.
- Paul will keep on referring to this passage in the Abraham story throughout the rest of the chapter.

Abraham *found* righteousness when he believed God.

- We will learn more about what Abraham believed about God in future considerations of Romans 4.
- For now, we can keep it quite simple.
- Abraham’s faith “consisted in taking God at his word, in believing that what he said was true, in trusting that what God promised he would bring to pass.”<sup>121</sup>

So, to anyone who believes the Bible, Paul’s proven it. Abraham’s justification came through faith in God.

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<sup>121</sup> Eerdman, *Romans*, 59.

Finally, let's consider the exact wording at the end of verse 3. Abraham believes God and God "counts" him as righteous.

- The word "counted" (λογίζομαι) is very important in chapter 4 and is used 12 times in the chapter (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, and 24).
- Paul does not say that faith *is* righteousness or it would make faith a work.
- He says that faith *is counted* (i.e., *reckoned, credited*) for righteousness.
- This passive verb means that God puts something on Abraham's account on the credit side of the ledger that balances out all his debts.
- That credit is belief in what God can do!

Now, when God looks at our works and compares them to our debts, He says, "Condemned." But when God looks at the one who runs to Him for help *in Jesus* and *believes*, He says, "Justified." You see, God provides righteousness that is not our own if we will trust in His Son!

John Bunyan had struggled with depression, attempting suicide on *many* occasions over *many* years, but one day as he was walking, he finally understood God's provision of righteousness.

"One day I was passing in a field and this sentence fell upon my soul: 'Your righteousness is in heaven.' I thought, also I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand and I said, 'There is my righteousness.' So that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could never say to me, 'You lack righteousness.' Because it was always right there in front of Him. I also saw moreover that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame of mind that made my righteousness worse. For my righteousness is Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now, my chains fell off and I was loosed from my afflictions and from my irons and my temptations fled away and I went home rejoicing because of the grace and love of God."

Some of you need to be freed up, some of you need to have your chains taken off. ***Is Jesus your righteousness?*** Will you believe in him today so that God can count that as your righteousness too? That is the right answer to what Abraham *discovered*—he *found* help from God not from his own works.

### 3) Conclusions (4–8)

After the question and answer from scripture, Paul draws two simple conclusions about the matter in verses 4–8.

- a) **#1: Working brings wages (4)** – <sup>4</sup> *Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.*

The first conclusion is that a gift is not given to one who is owed wages. ***Look with me at verse 4.***

The term translated "wages" (μισθός) refers to the payment someone receives for labor. The word "gift" (χάρις), however, is the word for grace or favor.

My son has been working for someone doing yard work. For his work, he receives wages—compensation, a paycheck. If your boss comes to you on payday and says, “Here is a gift.” You would think he is strange, or you would wonder if he has added a little more to your check. Working brings wages and that is not how justification works. Justification from God involves a free gift through His Son!

**b) #2: Believing brings righteousness (5–8)**

Paul’s second conclusion is that “believing brings righteousness.” This idea is clearly stated in verse 5 and then reinforced with another scriptural passage in verses 6–8. **Look with me at verse 5.**

- **Stated (5)** - <sup>5</sup> *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,*

Instead of working for justification, the one who gains righteousness is the one who believes “in him who justifies the ungodly” (ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῃ). There are at least two qualities of this description of God that are worthy of our reflection.

- First, “This description of God would certainly come as a shock to Paul’s Jewish readers, and devout God-worshippers as well.”<sup>122</sup>
- Second, this description of God is worthy of our reflection and meditation. God is the only one who can justify the ungodly in a just way. I think that this succinct description of God deserves more attention!

Now, in describing God in this way, Paul also implies that Abraham is among those who are ungodly.

- The word “ungodly” (ἄσεβῃ) was a strong word used by Abraham himself when he refers to the inhabitants of Sodom.
- It was also used of the wickedness of humanity in Genesis before the Flood. Paul has Abraham included as the ungodly.

The main point, however, is that anyone who believes in God can be counted as righteous. **Believing brings righteousness.**

- **Proven (6–8)** - <sup>6</sup> *just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:* <sup>7</sup> *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;”* <sup>8</sup> *blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

To prove this Paul appeals to scripture again in verses 6 through 8. **Let’s look there.**

Although most of this chapter is about Abraham, Paul briefly introduces the example of David as well.

- David is someone with which everyone can identify.
- We all have a depraved nature.

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<sup>122</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 228.

- We can all point to things in the past of which we are not proud (*i.e., skeletons in the closet*).
- David knew what it meant to succumb to the pressure of his own sinful desires.
- And David freely comments on the consequences of his sins with Bathsheba (*adultery, murder, deceit*) in this same psalm.
- He says,

*<sup>3</sup> For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

- David spent months, sitting on the throne of Israel “soaked to his eyes in hypocritical sin!”<sup>123</sup>
- His sin robbed him of joy and stripped him of health and vigor!
- Yet David breaks forth in song to say that he was blessed by God *because* God forgave his sin not on account of his own merit, but as a gift!

David rejoiced in the fact that his works or actions were not the basis of his justification.

Let’s look more specifically at what Paul quotes from David here! He says, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.” This important expression has several parts to it.

- Lawless deeds (αἱ ἀνομίαι) – This could be translated “acts of lawlessness.” It means to step over known boundaries—to transgress. David considers when he stepped over rules or laws that he knew were necessary.
- Sins (αἱ ἁμαρτίαι) – We have already considered this word in Romans 3. It means to fall short of God’s glory.
- Are forgiven ... and covered (ἀφέθησαν ... ἐπεκαλύφθησαν) – To these acts, David considers being “forgiven” and “covered.” David considers the man who is pardoned by God, having his sins covered like when flood waters covered the face of the whole earth, or a head-coving covered a head in the OT.
- The Lord will not count sin (οὐ μὴ λογίσται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν) – In the next verse, the same word for “counted” is used by David that was used already of Abraham. David considers the man for whom God has decided not to credit sin. Earlier the word was used of crediting righteousness to someone account. Now, David speaks of the possibility of a man not having his own sin credited against him.

All this leads David to use one word to describe someone who is covered and forgiven like this. That word is “blessed” (μακάριος).

- David knew that he was stuck! That he was found out! That he was damned!
- But then he finds himself in right relation to God, being acquitted by him.
- As such, he was blessed.
  - Being blessed, says John Piper, is “a condition where you are deeply secure and content and happy in God.”

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<sup>123</sup> In his sermon on Romans 4, Mark Minnick quoted this from a work by Alexander White.

- Sometimes people use the word “happy” here so that they can emphasize the inner contentment that such a man has!

This is too much for David, so he breaks forth in song to praise God and rejoice that his lawless deeds and sins could be forgiven and covered—not counted against him. Have you ever been so overwhelmed that God does not consider your actions—all your evil thoughts, greed, manipulation, cursing, anger, lusts, idolatry in pursuing things and money and cars and houses in place of God—that you broke down or break forth in praise? We truly are blessed!

## b. Abraham and circumcision (9–12)

***Have you ever received an inheritance?*** Perhaps, you are not as fortunate as an unexpected person in Portugal that our family read about last night. He had no idea that a wealthy, ruler had randomly portioned out his estate to strangers that he picked out of the phone book! This bachelor had no relatives of his own, so when he died at the age of 42, random strangers became very wealthy! Now, that sounds like a pretty good deal, right?!

Unfortunately, the way it normally works in our society is that an inheritance is linked with the death of a loved one. For most of us, we would much rather have the presence of our mom and dad than the inheritance.

Now, in our passage, this morning, we will learn something about an inheritance that will completely blow your socks off! It will not only be a better inheritance than you could ever imagine, it comes through something much, much better than death.

The main premise of the passage is that we will inherit the whole world if we follow in the steps of Abraham’s faith.

- For some here today, this will be a call to believe in Jesus for the very first time.
- For others, this sermon will be a challenge to persevere in faith even in the midst of your difficulties, disease, or death.

In Romans 4, Paul appeals to Abraham for a few reasons. He does so *because* the Jewish people felt that he was the prototype of the *devout Jew* and *because* he forms a great example of how someone can be justified before God.

- Last week, we considered what Paul said about justification and “works” to find out that Abraham himself (*and David also!*) was not justified by works.
- This morning, we will consider two other *false* means of justification that Paul rules out by the example of Abraham.

We start with Abraham and “circumcision” in verses 9–12. Paul asks how the great father of the Israelite people was justified. Was it through circumcision? ***Well, let’s look there.***

**1) Questions (9–10a)** - <sup>9</sup> *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* <sup>10</sup> *How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?*

Paul begins in this passage with questions about circumcision and Abraham.

- His use of rhetorical questions is a vivid way to pull the reader into his line of thinking.
- Paul has just considered the blessing that David described, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not count his sin.”
- The question that Paul answers in this paragraph is whether David’s blessing of forgiven sin is only available to *Jewish* people or whether it is also for *Gentiles*.

To answer this, Paul asks questions about Abraham. He *specifically* asks whether Abraham was counted righteous before or after he was circumcised. It has been some time since we looked at Abraham in Genesis, so reviewing some of the high points will help us.

- The **Abrahamic covenant** is found in Gen 12. Here God makes three promises to Abraham.
- **Abraham’s justification** occurs in Gen 15.
- **Abraham’s circumcision** is found in Gen 17.
- **Abraham’s sacrifice** of Isaac is in Gen 22.

Now, the Jewish people tended to emphasize Abraham’s circumcision and the sacrifice of Isaac, but Paul goes farther back to make a point about faith. So, let’s look at these things a bit closer.

- Turn in your Bibles first to Gen 15:6. **Read it.** In this passage, Abraham is approximately 85 yrs old. You have to turn pages forward in your Bible to find when he was circumcised.
- Turn to Gen 17:24. **Read it.** It is significant that Abraham is now approximately 99 yrs old. So, when was Abraham justified? At 85 or 99?

Well, that is the nature of the questions Paul asks in Rom 4:9–10a. With these questions, he appeals to “the chronological progression of the Genesis narrative about Abraham.”<sup>124</sup>

- 2) **Answer (10b–11a)** - *It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup> He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

Now, his answer comes clearly at the end of verse 10 and in verse 11. **Read it.**

Abraham was circumcised after (14 yrs after) he was justified. Circumcision was never to bring salvation but was to be a sign or seal of justification. It was the physical identification of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and thus was something that confirmed the validity of God’s blessings already promised to Abraham.

You see, God controlled and led in the events of Abraham’s life *and* had Moses record this in the scriptures so that 2,000 years later Paul might be able to show definitively that justification does not come through the work of circumcision. May we stop for a moment to realize that God has a perfect timing for everything in our lives. Even though we may never fully understand His purposes, we can trust the plans and purposes of a sovereign God in our lives.

### 3) **Purposes (11b–12)**

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<sup>124</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 268. Paul argues in a similar but more complex way about the chronological progression in Abraham’s life in Galatians 3 as well.

But next Paul *specifically* records what God's purposes were in doing things in this way in Abraham's life. That is what verses 11b and 12 are about. ***What were God's purposes to justify Abraham on the basis of faith and not circumcision?*** His purposes are two-fold. Look for the words "to make him" as we read verses 11b–12a.

- a) **To make him the father of Gentile believers (11b)** - *The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,*

So, let's look at God's first purpose in doing it this way! **Read verse 11b.**

First, God justified Abraham before his circumcision to show something to future generations through Paul—to make Abraham the father of all "Gentile believers." That is who Paul is describing when he says, "all who believe without being circumcised." You see, it is "through faith and not through incorporation into the nation of Israel" that Gentiles are counted righteous.<sup>125</sup>

This is a very important point that Paul makes repeatedly about Gentiles.

- They do not need to become Jews to be saved.
- They need to believe in Jesus alone for their salvation.

Abraham was an ungodly man from among the nations when he was justified, thus he is the father of all who believe while uncircumcised.

- b) **To make him the father of Jewish believers (12)** - <sup>12</sup> *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

That is God's first purpose. ***But if righteousness was possible without circumcision, why did God have Abraham get circumcised later?*** Well, Paul will answer that with another of God's purposes in verse 12. **Look there.**

Second, God later had Abraham circumcised so that he could also be the father of the Jewish people, but, more specifically, the ones "following in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham."

- "The image of walking in someone's footsteps was sometimes used in ethical exhortations of imitating someone's example."<sup>126</sup>
- So, Abraham is the father of *Gentile & Jewish* people who believe God for justification.

I was listening to my cousin's sermon on Romans 4 and he reminded me at the end of his sermon of that profound and enlightening and moving, children's song. ***Do you remember it?***

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<sup>125</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 270.

<sup>126</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 236.

*Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord.*

The theology of the song is *actually* fine (*as far as it goes!*), although I could do without all the spinning and stomping and thrashing! You see, Abraham was the prototype of a *Gentile* believer (before his circumcision) *and* a *Jewish* believer who walks in faith not works. In this way, we can speak of the true children of Abraham, people from every ethnicity who are justified through faith and not through any external mark of Jewish identity.

### c. Abraham and law (13–17)

But Paul's not done using Abraham to mark out *false* means of justification. In verses 13–17, he deals with one other false means—a means that he has been picking apart for some time now—the law of Moses. Now, it seems to me that Paul's whole argument in these verses answer two questions: 1) What is the “Abrahamic Promise (v. 13a)? and 2) How did this promise find fulfillment (vv. 13b–17)?

So, let's answer these questions as they come.

#### 1) What is the “Abrahamic Promise” (13a)? <sup>13</sup> *For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world*

First, we answer, “What is the “Abrahamic Promise”? **Look with me at the beginning of verse 13.**

**So, what is the promise that God made to Abraham?** If I were using the OT to answer that question, I would point you back to the Abrahamic covenant given in **Gen 12:2–3**. It says,

*<sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.*

God promises Abraham 1) innumerable descendants, 2) land, and 3) a great name that brings blessings to all the nations of the earth. That is the “Abrahamic Promise.”

Now, Paul makes much out of these promises to Abraham in his letters.

- The “Abrahamic promise” was very significant in Paul's biblical theology—as significant, if not more so, than the “Mosaic law.”
- That is, he makes much out of the Mosaic covenant but also the Abrahamic covenant and its promises.
- As far as justification goes, however, it is the Abrahamic promise that is better because it demands faith (*simple belief*) instead of obedience.
- John Stott says, “Law-language ('you shall') demands our obedience but promise-language ('God will') demands our faith.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 131.

Yet, in Romans 4, Paul describes the content of the Abrahamic promise with different words than Genesis 12. He says that the promise was that Abraham “would be heir of the world” (τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου). **But what does that mean?**

- Well, I think Paul might be summarizing the promises made by God to Abraham through the Abrahamic covenant.
- God promised 1) that Abraham would inherit the land, 2) that he would have innumerable descendants, and 3) that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him.
- Later, God promised 4) that his descendants would possess the gates of their enemies.
- In other words, according to Romans 4, Abraham and his descendants would inherit the world.

Now, there is still *some* actualization of that promise yet to be realized. You see, it will be in the future, Millennial Kingdom that the children of Abraham will inherit the whole cosmos. This is true for all of us who believe in God through Jesus Christ.

- We not only **rule** the whole world together—from here to Spain and Russia and China and Africa and Canada, we will also **own** it all together.
- And this is true for you and you and you, if you believe in the God who raises the dead!

That is Abraham’s promise and this is all possible by the Messiah who came as his descendant and died in our place and was raised for our righteousness!

## 2) How did the promise find fulfillment (13b–17)?

Next, Paul takes things further to answer how the promise was or is realized and the second part of verse 13 answers it in a nutshell. **Read v. 13b.**

This two-fold answer is that the realization of Abraham’s promise did not come through the Mosaic law but through the righteousness of faith. The rest of the paragraph expounds on this simple two-fold answer. So, verses 14 and 15 explore more about why it did not come through the law and verses 16 and 17 explain why it came through faith.

- a) **Not through the law (13b; 14–15)** – *Did not come through the law ... <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is not law there is no transgression.*

***Let’s look at what Paul says about why Abraham did not receive the fulfillment of his promises through the law in verses 14 and 15.***

In these verses, Paul gives reasons (“*for*” in verses 14 and 15)—reasons why the law of Moses could not bring Abraham’s promises to fruition. Now, Paul could reason from chronology again and argue that Moses and his law were nowhere on the scene when Abraham was alive. Moses comes 400 years later. But that is not what he does here!

Instead, he starts by saying that if law observation is what brings the inheritance of the world, then faith and promise are “null” and “void.” Now, while there are a few different ways to think about this, it seems to me that Paul is saying that if obedience to the law was the requirement to be an heir of the world, then no one would ever get it. The promise would be worthless *because* no one can adequately adhere to the law.

And that is true because (“for”) the law brings wrath. Instead of bringing fulfillment to Abraham’s promises, the law actually turned the sins of the Israelite people into conscious “transgression” (παράβασις).

- The word “transgression” describes “the violation of commandments that are specified and written.”<sup>128</sup>
- This is a specific kind of sin.
  - Sin is the general category.
  - Transgression specifically speaks of violating commands.
- So, Israel became aware of specific regulations and expectations that they did not know clearly before and then stepped over those now known boundaries.
- It is like when someone puts a tag on a mattress that says, “Do not remove under penalty of law.” Before you read the tag, you had no desire to remove it, but now you think: “How would they ever know it was me?”
- Doug Moo says it this way, “Violation of law turns ‘sin’ into the more serious offense of ‘transgression,’ bringing God’s wrath as punishment.”<sup>129</sup>
- So, instead of bringing “fulfillment of promise,” the law brings “wrath.”
- The law renders people more accountable to God than they were before.

You see, even in parenting, it’s one thing to correct your child when he or she did not know something was wrong. It is something else entirely, when your “little bundle of depravity” (*I mean “joy”*) knows that something is wrong and decides to do it anyway! Many years of parenting tells me this is so, but so too does looking in the mirror at myself! “The law not only exposes our sin, it awakes our rebellion!”<sup>130</sup>

So, that is why Abraham’s promise does not come through the Mosaic law. It is *because* God wants people to actually experience its fulfillment, and the law only brings God’s wrath and transgressions.

- b) But through faith (13c; 16–17) – But through the righteousness of faith ...** <sup>16</sup> *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,* <sup>17</sup> *as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of God in whom he believed who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*

But then Paul considers how the promises to Abraham *are* realized. **Look with me at verses 16 and 17.**

Paul explains that Abraham’s promise is realized only through faith or belief and then gives two purposes here for why it was based on faith.

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<sup>128</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 230.

<sup>129</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 276.

<sup>130</sup> Excerpt from John Piper’s sermon on Rom 4:13–15, available at *Desiring God* online.

- **So that the promise might rest on “grace”** – “Grace” is a very important Pauline concept, used 24 times in Romans alone. It normally speaks of God’s favor or generous gift given to undeserving people. Instead of wrath, those who are in Jesus Christ experience God’s favor. In Romans, this response from God is sometimes personified as a sphere in which we live or something that rules and multiplies more quickly than sin.
  - Everyone here today who fights sin will fight the reality and ongoing presence of sin in our lives in one of two ways.
  - We will all sin sometime later today or tomorrow! That is our nature!
  - When we sin, we will come to God and renounce it and either 1) work harder to fight sin through obeying God’s laws—through our performance of His commandments—or 2) we will go to God to find new portions of grace through the Spirit to put to death our sins.
  - One way brings transgressions and wrath, the other will bring you to inherit the world!
- **So that the promise might be guaranteed to *all* of Abraham’s children** – God does it this way so that genuine Jewish *and* Gentile **believers** might be able to experience its fulfillment as they follow the example of their father (*the scriptural citation proves that he is the father of Jews and Gentiles*). It’s a guarantee. I love that word!

- Now, the final part of verse 17 is difficult. I prefer the way the NET translation has it:

*He is our father in the presence of God whom he believed– the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do.*

This part of the verse is Paul’s way to emphasize the great object of Abraham’s faith. Three times Paul describes the object of Abraham’s faith. It is “God,” “whom,” and “God.”

Abraham put his faith in the only One who could help him! You see, “what sustained Abraham in his faith, was a vision of God.”<sup>131</sup> Abraham’s faith was fundamentally faith in God.

Now, we can take things a bit further about Abraham’s vision of God in this passage and learn that he believed two things about God.

- **First, he believed that God “gives life to the dead.”** *Do you see that in verse 17?*
  - Well, that is an unusual way for Paul to describe Abraham’s faith in God.
  - But for us, who believe in Jesus, it is perfect!
  - Now, Paul will further develop this at the end of Romans 4 and more specifically point to Abraham’s belief that God can make his and Sarah’s bodies alive so that they can bear a child.
  - Now, however, we will just observe that Abraham believes that God can do it!
- **Second, he also believed that God can “call into existence the things that do not exist.”**

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<sup>131</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 236.

- God had made a lot of promises to Abraham, but now he is in his 80's or 90's and he sees no human way for these things to occur.
  - Yet Abraham puts his gaze on the One who “summons or calls things that do not yet exist as though they already do exist.”<sup>132</sup>
  - You see, for Abraham it was like this: He really wanted or needed something to happen, and everyone thought there was no way it would happen.
  - But then on the other side, he had the One who makes everything happen out of nothing—the Sovereign God.
  - And so, he chose to believe that God could do it!
- He was like a small child with a small view of challenges and threats and impending dangers but a big view of God's power!

As we close, let's remember this week that we will inherit the whole world someday as children of Abraham through faith. We can hear this promise and not make much of it! It can fly right by us. As you sit here right now, do you *really believe this*? This is worthy of our reflection for the whole week!

You ask: “***What difference does this make for us now?***”

- I say, first, let it fill you with great joy and happiness as a child of God through faith alone! Delight in this! This is our sure future if we trust in God.
- Second, may this also help you to bear suffering well. Some of you are going through *really* difficult things!

Men and women, I am confident that thoughts like these are not just little Band-Aids that help you when things are a little off! No, it's thoughts like these that will sustain us even in those moments when we face death itself. ***One day, all those who believe in Jesus and follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith will inherit the whole world!***

- Maybe it is thoughts like these that strengthened Pastor Tim Keller recently, in his final moments, to utter these final words to his wife Kathy: “There is no downside to me leaving, not in the slightest.”
- May God help us all to reflect on and enjoy such a marvelous truth this week!

#### d. Abraham and faith (18–25)

***Have you ever been in a “hopeless situation”?*** Perhaps, you're experiencing one of these now!

- Maybe you have been asked to do something at work where you do not have the **resources** (*time, manpower, tools, supplies*) to get the job done! So, you try to keep a positive perspective, but things get worse, and you know it will not end well!
- Or, perhaps, you are struggling in a relationship with someone you love who always struggles with the same sins (*and it is destructive, hurtful, painful*). Perhaps, it has been many years! ***How should you respond? How can you keep going?***

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<sup>132</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 351.

- Maybe you are facing a health crisis. The diagnosis is not good. From a human perspective, things will not get better. ***What should you do? How do Christians face “impossible situations?”***

Well, in our sermon text this morning, we will hear about how Abraham faced an impossible situation. Abraham weighed two things when determining how to live.

- He considered 1) his physical circumstances *and* 2) the promises of God and gave greater significance to God’s promises and the hope that he had in them!

The aim of our short sermon this morning will be to motivate you to trust God even when you face hopeless situations.

We have considered *false* means of justification (*being made right with God*) throughout our series on Romans 4 so far.

- Paul uses Abraham’s story to show us that works, circumcision, and the law will not accomplish it.

Now, we come to the proper way one is made right with God. The only way one is justified before God is faith.

Now, specifically, this final text helps us learn more about faith by considering the nature and the object of Abraham’s faith.

## 1) The nature of Abraham’s faith (18–22)

As we look at the nature of Abraham’s faith, we will draw out lessons regarding *genuine* faith. In verses 18–22, Paul emphasizes four qualities of the nature of genuine faith.

- a) **Genuine faith rests on hope from God (18).** <sup>18</sup> *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told. “So shall your offspring be.”*

The opening statement of verse 18—“in hope he believed against hope” (Ὁς παρ’ ἐλπίδα ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι ἐπίστευσεν)—has two important senses that reveal two qualities.

The main verb is “believed”—Abraham believed—and this whole phrase tells us more about that faith. Around the verb, Paul uses the word “hope” twice, revealing two qualities.

***First, genuine faith rests on hope [from God].*** My favorite translation of the beginning of this verse is the NET Bible: “Against hope he believed in hope.” I want to focus on that last part first—“he believed in hope.”

- God had made many promises to Abraham.
- We looked at the Abrahamic promise last week in Gen 12, including God’s promises of a great name, innumerable descendants, land, and a blessing for all people.
- Among these promises, God pointed out the stars in the heaven and said, “So shall your offspring be.”
- Abraham’s faith was rooted in and fixed upon the sure future of this promise from God.

- That was his hope from God.
- So, Abraham believed on the basis of hope in order that he might actually become the father of many nations.
- The same is true for us!
  - Our faith is future-oriented as well.
  - We also look to the fulfillment of God's promises to us.
  - Our faith rests on hope from God!

**b) Genuine faith does not rely on human hope (19).** <sup>19</sup> *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.*

In the following verse (v. 19), however, Paul expounds on the other part of the opening statement—"Against hope Abraham believed." This means that Abraham believed opposed to what human hope might indicate. **Let's look at how Paul expounds on this in verse 19.**

Bob Yarbrough says, "A great test of faith is whether a person can continue to believe God's promises when appearances seem to destroy all hope."<sup>133</sup> Abraham's faith remained strong even in the midst of two significant challenges. He faith did not weaken although ...

- **His body was "as good as dead"** (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα [ἤδη] νεκρωμένον). Now, this description of his body is quite interesting. It could be translated "now" or "already dead." What a way to describe Abraham! Although he was still living, his ability to have children was already gone. Abraham was *not able* to father children *because* he was almost 100 years old.
  - Now, there are potential issues here that can be seen as we note three passages in the Abraham story.
  - **Turn to Gen 16:1–4.** Abraham is the father of Ishmael through Hagar.

<sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. <sup>4</sup> And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

- **Turn to Gen 21:1–2.** This is the account of Sarah and Isaac.

<sup>1</sup> The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.

- **Finally, turn to Gen 25:1–2.** Here Abraham has other children after Isaac's birth.

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<sup>133</sup> Yarbrough, *Romans*, 81.

<sup>1</sup> Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

- What are the potential problems?
  - It seems that his body was not really dead.
  - He had children both before and after Isaac.
  - There are two possible solutions.
    - First, it may be that Abraham's body was only "considered to be dead."
      - This was Augustine's solution.
      - He felt that the real problem in their infertility was Sarah's womb.
    - Second, it may be that Abraham was rendered ineffective in the 13–14 years since Hagar's conception, but that God restored him fully.
      - This solution was offered by Calvin.
      - So, when God restores; He really restores!
- **Sarah's womb was "barren."** The other problem also involves "deadness" or "death."
  - Now, Paul could have used a specific Greek word for "barrenness" here, but he chooses the word "dead."
  - Sarah's womb was dead.
  - That is, her reproductive abilities completely ceased and withered away.
  - When God looked into the womb of Sarah, he saw "nothingness, emptiness."
  - There was nothing there at all!

So, Abraham's and Sarah's abilities to have children were completely empty. According to all human calculations, they could not have children.

- Even modern doctors would have to tell them there is no hope here. Yet God delivered on the promise!
- ***Can you imagine this—a 90-year-old woman and a 100-year-old man have a child?***
  - Someone illustrated it this way:
    - We have several college kids home on break.
    - ***Could you imagine your mother sitting you down when you got back?***
      - She got the whole family together and said that she has some amazing news.
      - Although it comes as a surprise to everyone and although they thought it was no longer possible, yes, you guessed it—Grandma is having a baby!"
      - You would be like, "Ok!" "Wow!"

Despite all *human* odds, Abraham "hoped against hope" and remained firm ("did not weaken") in his belief in God. James Dunn describes a key to strong faith: "Faith is strong precisely because it looks to God and does not depend on human possibilities."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, ?.

- Faith is not dependent upon circumstances.
- We must focus more on God's ability than all the sad conditions around us and in us.
- Genuine faith rests on hope from God not human hope.

c) **Genine faith can grow stronger (20–21).** <sup>20</sup> *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,* <sup>21</sup> *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

That leads to another description of the nature of Abraham's faith. From him we learn that *genuine* faith can grow stronger in verses 20–21. **Read it.**

Now, Paul describes what happened to Abraham's faith in these challenges in three ways.

- First, "no unbelief made him waver."
- Second, "he grew strong in his faith."
- Finally, he was "fully convinced that God was able."

Let me point out a few things here. I would like to mention first that these verbs and participles are passive. They are divine passives. Fundamentally, this is something that God did in Abraham's heart.

Having said that, it *is* justifiable, however, to look at what was in his heart as an example for us.

- When we peel open Abraham's heart of faith, it was not "staggering" in unbelief, it was "growing stronger," and he was "fully convinced" that God was able!
- Although Abraham did consider all the obstacles, he counted God as able!
- I like how Tom Schreiner says it, "What sustained Abraham in his faith, then, was a vision of the God who could do the impossible."<sup>135</sup>
- And, men and women, this is how we can glorify God!

d) **Genuine faith is approved (22).** <sup>22</sup> *That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."*

That leads us to one last quality of the nature of genuine faith. **Look with me at verse 22.**

The key issue in verse 22 is to identify what Paul is talking about with the word "that"—"that is why." The question is what about Abraham's faith made it of such quality that God counted it to him as righteousness? Well, it seems that the marker of his genuine faith that counted was that he was fully convinced of God's power. He did not waver. He did not go back and forth in his confidence that God could make him the father of many people. He was actually, the father of no one, but he remained convinced in God's power. Men and women, "that is why" his faith counted!

2) **The object of Abraham's faith (23–25) –** <sup>23</sup> *But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,* <sup>24</sup> *but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who*

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<sup>135</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 236.

*raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,* <sup>25</sup> *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

That leads us to the final section of the chapter—verses 23–25—where Paul moves on to declare the object of Abraham’s faith or the object of Paul recording these thoughts about Abraham’s faith. **Let’s read them.**

Paul reflects on Abraham’s faith and righteousness for our sake. This is not an ancient text that has no bearing on our lives. It is recorded for us! Paul wants us to understand how God credited Abraham with righteousness on the basis of his faith so that we might have faith.

Now, what is the object of our faith? In whom must we believe? That is what Paul answers in the middle of verse 24—“him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.” The object of one’s faith is what makes it good or bad and when it comes to justification, only one object works. We must believe that Jesus died in our place on the cross and that God raised Him from the dead. We too must believe that God can bring life out of death. Abraham’s faith is a type of our faith. It points forward! We must believe that God raised Jesus from dead.

Now, I want to look a little more closely at what Paul says in verse 25. He says that Jesus was given over because of our trespasses and was raised by God for the sake of our justification!

- The word “trespasses” (παράπτωματα) is an important word in Romans. It fits within three important “sin words” in Romans 4 and 5.
  - The most common and broadest “sin word” Paul uses is the word “sin” (ἁμαρτία).
    - This word is used in noun and verb forms 55 times in Romans, including 17 times in Romans 6.
    - It is used of the general category of “missing or falling short of” God’s glorious being and its associated demands.
    - This is the condition of those who are under God’s wrath.
  - Within the category of sin, Paul also uses the word “transgression” (παράβασις).
    - This word is much rarer.
    - It is only used seven times in the NT.
    - Paul uses it five times, three being in Romans (2:23; 4:15; 5:14).
    - This word means “overstepping” and is used at times when Paul wants to talk about a conscious violation of known laws.
    - You see, it is possible to sin without knowing that something is a sin, and it is possible to know something is a sin and do it anyway.
    - That second category is “transgression.”
  - Also, within the general category of sin, Paul sometimes uses the word “trespass” (παράπτωμα). The word found here.
    - This word is used a bit more frequently in the NT (19 times).
    - Paul uses it nine times in Romans, seven of which are in Rom 4–5.
    - This word speaks of “stumbling” or “taking a false step.”
    - The word *actually* gives no indication of whether a law is known or not.

- In sum, this word speaks of sin in a vivid way as “stepping out of line” or “falling” without indicating whether the person knows it or not.

With these last comments in the verse, however, Paul’s main point is to make the object of *genuine* saving faith clear. As Abraham had to believe that God could bring life from the dead, all genuine believers must believe that God raised Jesus our Lord from the dead!

If you go down to lunch this afternoon at Broncos or 3 Amigos and get into a conversation with the waiter and he says, “Well, I have faith.” Is that enough? No, the object must be in God who raised Jesus our Lord!

As Abraham lived his life—looking forward to God’s fulfillment, looking forward to a son and a land and a blessing—we live our lives too. In the midst of hardships and difficulties and impossibilities, we look forward to our Christian hope found in justification through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He can provide in this life for you! He will provide in the next life for you. We indeed have an anchor of the soul—an anchor that enters into heaven itself through our forerunner, Jesus! I know some of you are facing challenges (at work, in relationships, in health). May God help you to “against hope believe in hope.”

I conclude with the words of the old hymn-writer about what Jesus has done for us:

*My faith has found a resting place  
Not in device nor creed  
I trust the Ever-living One  
His wounds for me shall plead*

*I need no other argument  
I need no other plea  
It is enough that Jesus died  
And that He died for me*

## **B. Its power (5:1–8:39)**

In Romans 1–11, Paul deals with his main *theological* reason for writing Romans. Since he wants his readers to understand the gospel more fully, he uncovers its nature (chs. 1–4), power (5–8), and history (9–11). In this sermon, we begin the second section—Romans 5–8—that highlights the power of the gospel and its effect on our lives.

Among other things, because we have been made right with God, we gain peace, grace, joy, hope, life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

More specifically, we will learn at least six large ways that the gospel impacts us in Romans 5–8.

- It secures for us foundational benefits (5:1–11).
- It delivers us from the condemnation of Adam’s sin (5:12–21).
- It frees us from sin’s reign (6:1–23) and the law’s captivity (7:1–25).
- It releases us through the Spirit’s power (8:1–30).
- It secures us against anything threatening to separate us from Christ’s love (8:31–39).

This morning, we will begin by looking at how our justification in Christ brings us many foundational benefits.

Imagine sitting across the negotiating table from someone offering you your dream job. My sons would love to play professional football. Maybe it's that! Or you have some other dream job! What is it? Imagine it. You try not to appear too excited because you cannot even believe that this is happening. You would gladly accept the job for what you get to do and how much you will be paid, but then the negotiator works through the "benefits package." He walks through all the fringe benefits involved *if* you sign the contract (dental; health; car; phone). With such a great job and benefits package, you quickly sign and walk away rejoicing! You are on *cloud 9*, greeting every person you see!

In our text this morning, Paul considers some of the benefits for those who are "justified" by God on the basis of faith. In this sermon, we will inform you of those benefits and encourage you to walk away rejoicing! I hope that if I were to visit grace grounds after the service that I would hear some spontaneous conversations between you, "Wow! How about those benefits?" I hope that some of you break proper protocols in your ABS this morning. You know, you sit there and stare straight ahead until the class starts! I hope that some of you turn to your neighbor and say, "Wow!" "Can you believe that we get those benefits?" I want you to be informed and walk away rejoicing!

### 1. It secures foundational benefits (5:1–11).

Paul describes three foundational benefits of justification in 5:1–11. These benefits come through the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit. ***Let's read the whole text and note the "Godhead."***

- a. **Peace (1)** – <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The first benefit is "peace" (εἰρήνη) with God in verse 1. ***Let's read v.1 again.***

There is a dramatic shift in this passage, where Paul moves from second and third person pronouns and verbs in chapter 4 to first person in chapter 5. He moves from "you" and "they" to "we." He wants us to consider how the gospel not only impacts him but each of us who are believers in Jesus Christ as well.

Now, the word "peace" is used 91 times in the NT and is used by biblical authors to emphasize both 1) the absence of hostility (*stated negatively*) and 2) the experience of well-being (*stated positively*).

- The Greek term is often used to translate the Hebrew word *shalom* in the LXX and might more fundamentally speak of "the well-being, prosperity, or salvation of the godly person."<sup>136</sup>
- That is what the Hebrew term emphasizes—the more positive sense of wellness with God.
- Now, in this passage, Paul speaks of this as something that a person gains when he or she is justified by faith.
- This is not something that he longs for or desires for himself or others, this is something that is a present possession of believers in Jesus Christ.
- We have a new state of existence in which we live, and it is defined by being at peace with God.

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<sup>136</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 299.

This peace is ours “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Now, this is a significant point that we should not take for granted. This “peace” is ours through Jesus and not through any other means or agency.

Now, this is not the only benefit in Romans 5–8 that comes through him!

- In **5:11**, at the end of this first section, we “rejoice” in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have joy because of him.
- In **5:21**, the end of the next section, we have “eternal life” through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- In **6:23**, he repeats that the gift of eternal life comes “in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- At the end of the next section, in **8:1**, he exclaims that there is now “no condemnation” to those who are “in Christ Jesus.”
- Finally, in **8:39**, Paul says nothing can separate us from “God’s love” that is “in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul sees all the benefits of Romans 5–8 as coming as we are “in Jesus” or identified and united with him. All God has for us is found “in” or “through” Jesus. This is the doctrine of ***union with Jesus***—a significant doctrine perhaps we can explore in greater depth in future sermons. All these benefits come through Jesus and our belief in his gospel. In 5:1, we learn that it is because of Christ’s amazing work that we are free from all hostility with God and the anxiety that it brings.

**b. Grace (2a) – <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.**

But the foundational benefits do not consist only of “peace.” We also get “grace.”<sup>137</sup> This is found in the first part of verse 2. ***Read that with me.***

Now, Paul’s brief description of grace in this verse is packed. Let’s consider what he says.

- **First, I want to consider the word “grace” itself. Grace is used in an unusual way in this verse!**
  - This word *normally* speaks of the way that God acts toward people, except where it speaks of “thanksgiving” being offered back to God (e.g., *Rom 6:17; 7:25*).
  - Grace *usually* speaks of God’s kindness or favor that he demonstrates to undeserving people.
  - In Romans, it is used 24 times.
  - This grace is received, it overflows, and it ensures promises.
  - In some of these texts, “grace” is personified so that it justifies and gives free gifts (see 5:15) and reigns (see 5:21; 6:14) and even chooses.
  - But in our text, Paul emphasizes a different *nuance* of grace.
  - Douglas Moo explains it well,
    - He says that it does not here denote “the manner in which God’ acts, or the gift that God gives, but the ‘state’ or ‘realm’ into which God’s redeeming work transfers the believer.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> The noun χάρις (*grace*) is used 24 times in Romans with a related noun χάρισμα (*grace gift*) being used an additional 6 times.

<sup>138</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 301.

- In other words, Paul says that we have access “into grace.”
  - Grace is like a sphere or realm of existence.
  - Paul is talking about the “sphere or dimension marked out by God’s grace.”<sup>139</sup>
- **That is when we learn that we have “access” (προσγωγήν) into this grace.**
  - As we demonstrate faith in the gospel, God gives us access to his abundant kindness and goodness.
  - Like opening a vault door and giving access to some unlimited treasure, God gives us grace instead of his wrath.
  - The word “access” is only used three times by Paul in the NT, yet its secular uses in other literature can help us grasp the metaphor.
    - In other places, it describes the “access” that ships have to a port city through a good harbor or the “access” that insiders give others to a powerful ruler.<sup>140</sup>
    - Jesus gets us “in” to the sphere or realm of God’s grace.
- **But Paul’s succinct description of this blessing is not finished. He says that we “stand” in this grace.**

The access that we have into God’s grace because of our faith in Jesus is not temporary. It would be depressing to enter into God’s rich kindnesses for a day or a month or a year and then to exit into God’s wrath again! Think about this! All of God’s power is in service to him showing favor to us instead of him showing his wrath toward us! We get grace and we remain in it!

### c. **Exultation (2b–11).**

Justification by faith in Jesus brings many benefits. We get “peace with God,” and we gain access to “grace,” but Paul has one more benefit in mind. Mentioned three times throughout the rest of the passage, Paul speaks of the way that we “rejoice” (καυχᾶμαι; see the word “*rejoice*” verses 2b, 3, and 11).

Now, this word is important! It is used five times by Paul in Romans in two chapters. Earlier it speaks of how the Jews *exulted in* or *boasted in* the *exclusive* relationships that they had with God and the law (2:17, 23). In our text, Paul describes how new covenant believers properly “boast” or “exult” as well. So, I will call this third point—“exultation” (*careful not exaltation*).

We will consider the first time that Paul uses it today and leave the last two for when we consider Romans again.

#### **1) We exult in hope of glory (2b). And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

So, first, because of being justified by faith, we exult or boast in “hope of the glory of God” (ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ) This is a loaded statement. In Romans 4, we considered Abraham

<sup>139</sup> Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 248.

<sup>140</sup> Thielman discusses these two secular uses of προσγωγή. Cf. Thielman, *Romans*, 266.

who “believed in hope.” Against all odds, Abraham continued to believe in God because of the hope of fulfilled promises that God had given to him. In this passage, we “boast or exult in hope.” There is something that we have as a sure expectation that provokes us to boast or exult. This hope is not just any kind of hope. It is hope “of the glory of God.”

But let’s explore more fully what this might mean. I will make three statements about it.

- **First, “hope” has to do with our certain future.**
  - There are a lot of things of which you are unsure of this morning.
    - Should you go out to dinner this afternoon or eat at home?
    - Should you go on vacation this summer or should you not?
    - Should you take that new job opportunity or stay where you are?
  - But the word “hope” carries with it confidence.
  - So, hope is our confident and sure anticipation as a follower of Jesus!
  - Not a probability, but a guarantee!
- **Second, the “glory” of God is fundamentally God’s weight or the full significance of His being and presence.**
  - The Hebrew word for “glory” found often in the OT meant “weighty” in the sense of “having *gravitas*, and, in the Greek, it came to mean what makes someone *impressive*.”<sup>141</sup>
  - We might talk today of someone being a “heavyweight” in their field of study or discipline.
  - They are experts and their opinion carries much significance.
  - So, when applied to God, the word “glory” can speak of the full weight of his entire being—the sum of all his attributes.
  - That is the glory of God.
  - It speaks of his entire being and presence.
- **Third, the way we “hope for” the glory of God is by looking forward to gaining something we lost or have departed from.**
  - Perhaps, you recall two significant texts earlier in Romans that spoke of the glory of God (see 1:23; 3:23). Because of our own sins, we fall short of God’s glorious being and presence and consequently lose it.
  - But God gives believers “hope” through the gospel that we will one day be able to know, experience, and participate in God’s being and presence again! Let’s consider another text in **Rom 8:18–25**.

*<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the*

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<sup>141</sup> Thiselton, *Romans*, 125.

*children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

- In this later text, Paul personifies creation (*all animate and inanimate creation*). He has creation groaning and longing to have a future like the future of the children of God. The children of God will experience a glorious future, filled with enjoying the full fruits of glorification (8:30). See also 2 Tim 2:10 and Col 3:4.

So, in Rom 5:2, Paul foreshadows this Romans 8 text, and says that we, who have been justified by faith, exult in the hope of our glory-filled future in the glorious presence of our great God!

Listen to how the Holy Spirit led Peter to say it! In 1 Peter 5:10, it says, “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

What a deal! We bring sin and condemnation and wrath and God gives peace and grace and hope of the glory of God to those who believe in His Son for salvation. What benefits are ours! Know this, men and women, and leave this place rejoicing!

Two weeks ago, we started to consider our “**foundational benefits**” in the gospel in Romans 5. As a result of our justification by faith in Jesus, we get some amazing benefits.

- We get 1) peace, 2) grace—both initial and continuing access to grace, and 3) exultation.
- That is, we have reason to boast or rejoice in things.
  - More specifically, we noted that the words “to rejoice” occur three times from Romans 5:2b–11, declaring three objects in which we now boast or rejoice in because of our justification.
  - We rejoice 1) in hope of the glory of God (v. 2b), 2) in sufferings (vv. 3–5), and 3) in God through Jesus (vv. 6–11).

In our last sermon, we were able to dig into the meaning of the first one.

- We considered what Paul means by saying that we now boast in the “hope of the glory of God.”
- You see, we lost something in the Garden when we sinned.
  - We fell short of God’s glory.
  - Left to ourselves, we exchange our glorious God for a lie and worship things that we create.
- But believers now boast in the hope of acquiring “the glory of God.”
- We have a magnificent future in the company of our glorious God forever!
- If “the earth is filled with his glory” as we just sang (and it is!), imagine what heaven is like!
- That is our glorious future!

***How could we not boast in that?***

But, in our sermon this morning, we will consider the second object of our boasting as believers. Lord willing, we will consider the final one next week. This cause for believer's exultation is a little different! We not only boast in hope of the glory of God, we also boast in suffering or afflictions! This reflection will be quite interesting.

***Have you ever seen someone fold under pressure?***

- I have a good friend (*who will remain nameless*), who humbly acknowledges that he's not good under pressure!
- We grew up together and I *can* attest that he is not a high performer under pressure.
- He was normally a decent **basketball** player, but when things came down to the wire—when under pressure—he would shrink back.
- I recall giving him an inbounds pass in the last two minutes of our state championship game only to see it sail through his hands and go out of bounds!
- We have played together in some **golf scrambles**.
  - He's normally very good.
  - But when he has to hit a shot he tops it.
  - When he needs to sink a put, he'll only get it halfway to the hole.
  - He always wants to go first so that he does not feel *any* pressure.
- He is not good under pressure.

In our sermon today, I desire to motivate you to think and live differently when under spiritual pressure. It is my hope that your "theology of suffering" becomes so strong by looking at this passage—so informed by the Holy Scriptures—that you are strengthened in suffering instead of wilting or fainting in it.

- 2) **We exult in our suffering (3–5).** <sup>3</sup> *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* <sup>4</sup> *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* <sup>5</sup> *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Now, to consider what Paul says about exulting in suffering, **let's look at verses 3–5.**

We not only boast in our future hope, we also boast in "sufferings" (θλίψις). Let's dig into this word before we consider how it relates to the rest of the passage *and* how we relate to it.

- The word "suffering" can be translated "afflictions" or "distresses."
- Now, this specific word *normally* connotes difficulties that come from outside of us—pressures that come from opponents or oppressors.<sup>142</sup>
- So, this speaks of the tribulations or afflictions that people inflict on us.

Now, what an unusual thing for Paul to say! **Why or how could Paul say that we "boast" or "glory" in sufferings?**

- Normally, these things are a "cause for alarm or complaint."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> For the connection between suffering and opponents, see Johnson, *Romans*, 86.

- We do not boast in sufferings, we lament in them!
- We hate them.
- You see, Paul’s attitude toward “suffering” is radically different than how we think about them.
- His perspective on these things is so different than ours in our soft 21<sup>st</sup> Century, American Christianity!

**So, what is Paul thinking?** I mean, it is one thing to boast in our glorious hope, but it is something completely different to boast in painful afflictions and difficulties. Paul is clearly seeking to “foster a positive attitude toward ‘affliction.’”<sup>144</sup> **So, how could God expect us to do this?**

Well, the answer in the text is by “knowing” something. **Do you see that in the middle of verse 3?** Paul knows something about suffering that we do not. We must know that “sufferings” produce. They produce results when believers go through them. Paul says we have a different attitude about suffering because of what we “know” about it.

**So, what can we know about suffering from this passage?** Well, simply stated, we should know that our “suffering” initiates a chain of results—a sequence—that ends with us not being “put to shame” (5:5a). More specifically, “suffering” produces “endurance,” “endurance” produces “tested character,” “tested character” produces “hope,” and “hope” will not “put us to shame.”

Now, I want to say two things about this chain of results.

- **First, Paul is not the only apostle to speak this way about our affliction or tribulation.** Two other apostles start their letters in a similar way.
  - Consider what the Apostle Peter says. In **1 Pet 1:6–7**, he says, <sup>6</sup> *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,* <sup>7</sup> *so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes through it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*
  - Consider what James, the brother of Jesus and the pastor of the Jerusalem church, said in **James 1:2–4**. He writes, <sup>2</sup> *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,* <sup>3</sup> *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.* <sup>4</sup> *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

So, it appears that these men—these apostles—these writers of inspired Scripture—knew something that we do not. They speak of results. They knew sufferings produce.

Imagine if I brought three guests up on stage and put them in a panel discussion.

- At the beginning, you wonder who the men are—they look old; they look ancient.
- So, I explained to you that these three men are the Apostles Paul, Peter, and James.

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<sup>143</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 267,

<sup>144</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 251.

- Then I asked them a question. I asked, ***“What do you think of suffering?”***
- Then they all gave different versions of the same answer. They said, ***“Well, suffering? I glory in it! It brings me joy.”***
- What might we think?
  - We might think these old men are crazy!
  - Maybe they are masochists!
  - Maybe they love to hurt.
  - So, we asked them to clarify, and they said, ***“No, it is not the pain, it is the product! It is the results! It is what it yields!”***

They know God uses suffering in the believer’s life to work results. So, they all speak of the value and joys of suffering!

- **Second, we need to consider *each* word in this chain to fully grasp the value of suffering.**
  - **First, we learn that sufferings produce “endurance” (ὑπομονήν).**
    - This word means “patience” or “steadfast endurance.”
    - Later, in the book, Paul informs us that this “steadfastness” or “endurance” is something that God produces.
    - In Rom 15:5, he says, “Now may the God who gives ‘endurance’ and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another.”
      - This is a prayer wish!
      - So, in sufferings, God produces endurance—the ability to remain strong under the pressures put on us!
  - **Next, we see that endurance produces “character” (δοκιμήν).**
    - This word is a rarer word in the NT, used only seven times and only by Paul.
    - It is used frequently enough though that its meaning is apparent.
    - It speaks of being “tested” or “proven.”
    - Thus, I prefer the translation “tested character.”
      - John Stott says that it “is the quality of a person who has been tested and has passed the test.”<sup>145</sup>
      - This is the difference between a new recruit and a veteran.
      - In ***Phil 2:22***, Paul says that the Philippians believers know of Timothy’s “proven value” or “tested character.”
      - Thus, those—like Timothy—who go through suffering and are steadfast gain “tested character.”
      - The steel of their character is tempered as they stand in the fires of suffering!
      - He or she has been through the test before, and you know they can handle the strain.
      - They have “tested character.”

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<sup>145</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 142.

- Perhaps, you have met someone who endured great fires of affliction (e.g., Elizabeth Elliot, Corrie Ten Boom, an elderly believer).
  - Listen, you cannot be “tested” without the afflictions!
    - You can know theology.
    - You can grasp arguments.
    - You can learn any doctrine.
    - But you cannot be tested or proven without tests.
  - You might not like the test; you might cry out to God to save you from the test but know that God is using the test to make you tested!
- **Next, we learn that character produces “hope” (ἐλπίδα).**
  - That is when we come to the next result in the chain of results that God works in believers who go through suffering.
  - Earlier in our passage, we studied this word. It speaks of “settled” anticipation or “confident” expectation.
  - So, when we go through suffering, God produces steadfast endurance in us and then we become tested people and then we grow confident about our future.
  - And, men and women, it is impossible for me to over-emphasize the value and importance that the NT places on hope!
  - It is a part of the great Christian triad (i.e., *love, faith, hope*) that Paul repeats often (*1 Corinthians, Thessalonian Epistles, Colossians*) and it is a key to our Christian experience and faithfulness.
  - This is what fuels us to keep going *and* this is what God works in us as we pass through tribulations.

**Sinclair Ferguson** illustrates this kind of hope well.

- When he was preaching one day, he called his audience to imagine that they were parents who wanted to surprise their child with a Christmas gift.
  - So, under the cover of darkness on a cold night in December, they get a new bicycle out of the car and carefully try to sneak it into the house.
  - All along, however, little **Johnny** is looking out his second story window, hoping to see what he is going to get.
  - And, to his delight, he gets an eyeful!
  - Well, a few days later, Johnny’s aunt asks him what he wants for Christmas and he says with a confident twinkle in his eye—“I hope that I get a bike!”
  - That is the kind of hope that God produces in us through suffering and enduring!
  - You have experienced enough—you have seen enough—that you know it will all come to pass.
- **And, so, finally, we learn that this hope will not “put us to shame” (οὐ καταισχύνει).** Now, these words are often used in contexts where someone boasts about something or someone like it is in our passage. For instance, consider 2 Cor 7:14 and 9:4.

2 Cor 7:14 – *For whatever boasts I made to him [Titus] about you, I was not put to shame.*

*2 Cor 9:4 – Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident.*

Paul had boasted and the Corinthians need to come through *so that* he will not be embarrassed or ashamed of what he said. In Romans, he says that believers who boast even in suffering will gain hope that will not embarrass or disappoint.

It seems that Paul might have the Psalms in his mind here. In several Psalms, the psalmist cries out to God and says, “Do not put me to shame” (cf. *Psalm 22, 25, etc.*). Paul knows that the hope of the believer will not put us to shame.

Now, we can know that our hope will not shame or disappoint us because of what we learn at the end of verse 5. That is what Paul mentions there. ***How can we know our hope is certain? How can we be so sure that our future is secure?*** Imagine talking with some unbeliever in your neighborhood about this. He asks, “How can you be so sure that what you believe is right?”

- Well, we know that our future is sure *because* of what we have already experienced from God!
- Paul’s way of thinking here is that our hope for the future is based on what we have already received from God.

Now, the way that Paul says this is instructive for us as we prepare for the Lord’s Table.

- Paul says that we can be confident in our future because in our past God “poured out” his love to us through the Holy Spirit that he has given to us.
  - Wow! This is good.
  - Notice, Paul does not say that God gave us his love, but that God poured it out on us.
  - You cannot pour out something that there is only a small, trace amount of!
  - No, this verb is a vivid metaphor that was used of “cloudbursts on parched” ground.<sup>146</sup>
  - You know what that is like—when a dark cloud pours down rain!
  - This beautiful language connotes abundant, extravagant, effusive love, pouring out in abundance on us!<sup>147</sup>

And our experience of this love comes through the means of God’s Holy Spirit, who also is given to us. But what expression of love has He poured into our heart? What is it that we have experienced if we are believers? That is when we see in the next verse Paul’s further explanation—“for.” ***Read verses 6–8.***

That explanation grounds our experience of God’s love in the historical events of the cross. Our subjective feelings of God’s love come from the facts of Jesus death on the cross for us! Oh, men and women, this is the great, abounding love of God that the Spirit pours into hearts if they will believe in His Son.

God gives us these words so that we will not fold under the pressure—so that we will not wither in afflictions. Instead, we must know about the sequence of results that God works in our sufferings! Even our worst moments can be faced with joy and exultation if we know this! We

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<sup>146</sup> This is Stott’s language. Cf. Stott, *Romans*, 143.

<sup>147</sup> Moo uses much of this language in his comments on this passage. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 304.

can exult even in sufferings because we know God is using them, and, in the end, we will not be disappointed!

### 3) We exult in God through Jesus (6–11).

As we come to Rom 5:6–11 today, we come to the final object of our “boasting” or “exultation.” In the past few weeks, we have observed Paul’s outline for the beginning of Romans 5. He marks it out by calling us to boast in three things:

- **First, because we have peace and grace, we boast “in hope of the glory of God.”**
  - That is, we exult in the fact that we will experience “God’s glory” in our future!
  - We have experienced enough to know that what is coming will be glorious!
  - It is like the little boy that has been given so many good gifts from his parents in the past that he knows this Christmas will not disappoint!
- **Second, we boast “in suffering.”** We do so because of its sequence. God uses it to create endurance and tested character and hope that will not disappoint us!
- **Finally, today, we will see that we boast “in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:11).**

Now, Paul described *the Jewish person’s* falsely-based exultation as being in God too. **Consider Rom 2:17–18.**

*<sup>17</sup> But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup> and know his will and approve what is excellent.*

They boast in God because he chose them as his people, he marked them out through circumcision, and he gave them the law. Formerly, we called these things sources of Jewish pride that Paul pricks like balloons. They boasted in God because he had demonstrated covenant love to them through these things and he had. Yet, their problem is that they felt that Moses and circumcision were not just means of God’s grace to them, they thought that they were means that would bring them to God. That, however, was simply not the case. They could not be “saved” through works of the law or circumcision.

In our passage, however, Paul imagines *new covenant believers* exulting in God *properly*. We do so on an entirely different basis. We do so “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:11). And Jesus is not just God’s demonstration of grace and love for us, Jesus gets us to God. He justifies, reconciles, and saves us!

So, this morning, we will consider two reasons for believers to “boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” throughout verses 6–11. We will consider each reason as it comes in the passage.

- a) **We boast in God *because* Jesus’s death shows his love for us (6–8).** <sup>6</sup> *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* <sup>7</sup> *For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—*<sup>8</sup> *but God shows his love for us in what while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

So, let’s consider the first. It is found in verses 6 through 8. **Read it with me.**

The first reason we should boast in God is that the death of his Son shows his great love for us. That is, we boast in God **because he loves us**. Now, technically, the first word of verse 6 (“for”) reveals that what follows is Paul’s further explanation for how God poured out his lavish love on us through his Holy Spirit. We can be confident in our great and glorious Christian hope because God has already given us so much through his sacrifice of his only Son. More specifically, God poured out his lavish love on us at the cross of Jesus. You see, the cross is where God’s love was poured out for us.

So, the main subject of these verses is Christ’s timely and sacrificial death for us. The way that Paul articulates this can be seen if we consider how Paul describes different people in the verse. It seems to me that he imagines someone dying for three kinds of people.

- **First, he considers whether someone would die for “a righteous person” (δικαίου; 7a).**

A righteous person is someone who is right with God—one who is upright. This kind of person only exists in a fallen world because of God’s initiative and grace through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Paul first considers whether one would die to help or in place of an upright person. His conclusion is that one would “scarcely die” for that kind of upright person. The instinct for self-preservation *might* be overcome for such a person.

- **Second, he considers dying for “a good person” (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ; 7b).**

Then he considers dying for a good person. Now, this might be 1) just a synonymous way for Paul to describe the same person—both righteous and good—or 2) he could be describing a different kind of person here. This kind of person is not someone who is clinically or coldly righteous, but someone known as being good. Paul suggests then that people who’ve been good to us—whose goodness we know—*might* have a better chance to survive if we must die in their place. Some believe that this refers to a patron or benefactor who had been kind and generous to someone of lower economic standing.

- **Finally, he frames the whole paragraph by describing Jesus’s death for us.**

The purpose of considering the worth of such good and righteous people is to form a contrast with the condition of fallen sinners when Jesus died for them. Paul uses three words to describe them/us here.

- **We were “still weak” (ἔτι ἀσθενῶν).** The first way Paul describes us at the time of Christ’s death was that we “were still weak.” This is the opposite of God, who is often described as powerful. This word is used throughout the Bible to speak of both physical and spiritual weaknesses, diseases, and limitations, and powerlessness.
- **We were “ungodly” (ἀσεβῶν).** Paul continues by saying that Christ died for “the ungodly.” Again, this is the opposite of God. Combining this word with “weakness” is a way to emphasize the huge chasm that stood between us and God. We were everything that He is not. We were weak. He is powerful. We were ungodly. He is God.

- **We were “still sinners”** (ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν). Finally, Christ died for us while we were still “sinners.” This word speaks again of falling short of God and his glory.

Using these three words paints a dark picture, especially when compared to others in Paul’s descriptions who are “good” and “righteous.” Paul emphasizes here that there was nothing lovely or attractive in us to prompt God to give his Son or the Son to give his life. So, as such unlovely and unattractive people, we should boast in God because he poured out his love on us at the cross.

- b) **We boast in God because we are not only justified and reconciled through Jesus, we will also be saved by him (9–11).** <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, “we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

That is when Paul gives another reason for us to exult in God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This final reason comes in verses 9–11. **Let’s read them.**

In this passage, Paul concludes with two “greater to lesser” arguments in verses 9 and 10 and then offers a final summary to make the point that since we have been justified and reconciled through him, we will also be saved by him. This forms Paul’s second reason for believers to exult in God through Jesus. We should do so because God not only justifies and reconciles us through him, He will also save us through him. In other words, we boast in God **because he will save us.**

I think the best way to begin studying verses 9–11 is to consider the soteriological concepts (“salvation words”) that Paul uses here.

- **“Justified” (δικαιωθέντες; 9a)**

The verb “justified” portrays a concept that we have considered several times already in Romans. Human beings stand in the right before God *only if* they believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ to be saved (cf. Rom 1:16).

- People are not upright or righteous on their own.
- They can only be righteous through God’s saving righteousness in Jesus.
- This makes God both just and the justifier of those who trust in him (Rom 3:26b).

So, we have righteousness from God and Rom 5:9a reminds us that God has done this for us “by” or “through” Jesus’s blood. His shed blood is not only **the cost** but also **the instrument** of our being made right with God. That is what justification took. Nothing less would satisfy.

- **“Reconciled” (κατηλλάγημεν; 10a)**

At the beginning of verse 10, Paul describes another salvific blessing that believers have in Jesus. Paul describes this blessing twice in verse 10. We have been reconciled when we were enemies and then he adds “having been reconciled we will be saved.”

Now, Paul's description of us as "enemies" (ἐχθρός) helps us understand what it means to be reconciled.

- The word "reconciled" was used often in descriptions of disharmony in interpersonal relationships.
- It is a relationship word.
- For instance, in 1 Cor 7, it is used of a woman who divorces her husband. In such a state, Paul says this woman *can be* "reconciled" to her husband.
- Consequently, it's pretty clear that this word speaks of bringing two people back together again.

Through Jesus's death on the cross, believers have been brought back together with God. God takes the initiative and it's entirely through his provision in Jesus that we are now friends instead of being hostile as his enemies. I love the words of one of the songs we sang this morning: "Once your enemy, now seated at your Table." Wow! What grace. God has brought us back to him. "Jesus, thank you!"

- **"Saved" (σωθησόμεθα; 9b; 10b)**

Finally, we consider the word "saved." This word is used differently than the other two that we have already considered.

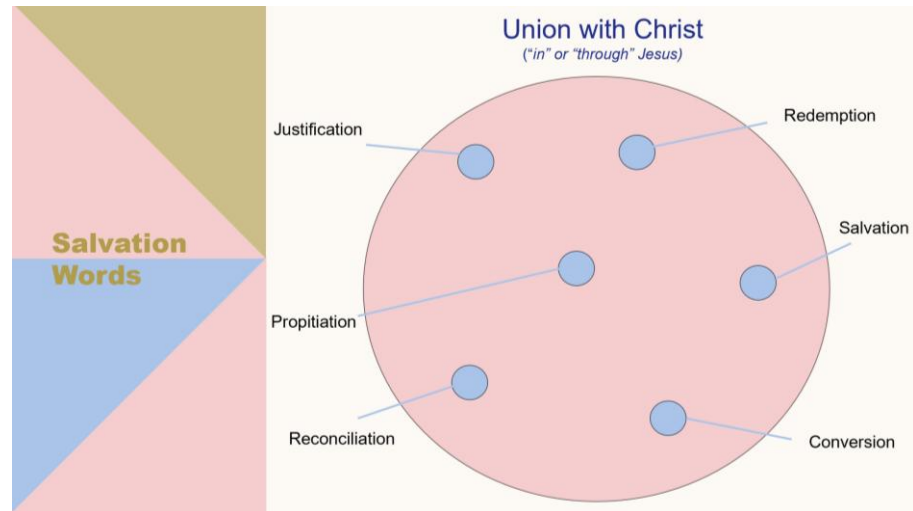
- While this verb is also passive, suggesting that this is something that God does for believers, it is also future.
- The others speak of things God has *already done* for believers.
- This word speaks of what *will happen* for us in the future.
  - Now, the scriptures *do* speak of our salvation as something that is past.
  - We can say that we are saved!
  - Yet, this passage highlights the future aspect of salvation.
  - There is a sense indeed that our salvation has not yet occurred.
  - In the future, God will deliver or save believers from His wrath.

Now, this text demonstrates that the blood of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross is where God's wrath against all our sin is completely satisfied. Justice is achieved at the cross so *that* God can show us the grace of delivering us completely from the consequences of our sin.

Now, I want to say two more things about these three words in the text.

- **First, Paul argues that since God's already justified and reconciled us, we can be sure that he will save us.**
  - The emphasis on this text is on saving us.
  - We can see this in the logic of verses 9 *and* 10 and the repeated mention of "saving" at the end of both verses.
    - Paul wants us to consider that ... God has done something more than making us right with him.
    - He had done something more than ... just reestablishing peace between us and him.

- He has secured our deliverance from all his holy and hot wrath against sin.
- It is this future salvation that forms the main reason for exulting God through Jesus. *We will be saved.*
- **Second, these three salvific realities—justified, reconciled, saved—all come to us “by” or “through” Jesus.** In other words, our union with Christ is the greater and broader reason why these three blessings are ours! As a matter of fact, Romans 5 thoroughly demonstrates that all these things are ours through our union with Jesus and his death on the cross for our sins (*notice how many times we see that in this passage!*). All these saving realities are ours “in Christ.” Consider this diagram!



- Union with Jesus is the broader theological concept in which all these other salvific blessings fit.
- In other words, all these blessings come to us as we are united with Christ through faith.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, as a concluding summary, Paul says “more than that” at the beginning of verse 11.

- The question that we pause to answer, however, is what is “that.”
- Well, I think it is more than boasting only in our hope of future glory and boasting in suffering, we also boast in God.
- We do so because we have now fully received “reconciliation” (καταλλαγὴν) through Jesus.
- We have received the object of God’s peace-making process—complete well-being and friendship with him—through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, men and women, we must be people who boast about God. Our boast *is* God. It is not anything else! It is not our pulpit or our sermons or our theology or our worship or our community or our evangelism or our philosophy. Our boast *is* God.

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<sup>148</sup> Schreiner expresses that union with Christ is the broader concept under which all the other soteriic blessings fit. See Schreiner, *Justification: An Introduction*, 128.

And we can boast in him only through the means of Jesus. We cannot boast in God because our works or our performance or our statistics make us appealing to him. No, it's only through Jesus that we can boast. Through Jesus, God not only loves us, he makes us right with him and makes us his friends and delivers us from His wrath.

## 2. It delivers from the condemnation of Adam's sin (5:12–21).

At the beginning of Romans 5, Paul describes the experience of *individual* believers in Jesus Christ.

- We gain 1) peace with God, 2) access to grace in which we stand, and grounds for 3) boasting in hope of future glory, in suffering, and in God through our union with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- It was a joy to slow down over these blessings the last several weeks and consider them in all their glory!

As we come to the end of the chapter, we switch to consider the effects of Adam's sin and Christ's work on humanity *as a whole*.

- In doing so, Paul draws out an extended contrast between two men—the first man, Adam, and the ultimate man, Jesus.
- The actions of both men affected those who followed.
- Adam's sin affects humanity; whereas, Jesus's obedience affects *new* humanity.

Now, this passage is undoubtedly one of the most difficult texts in Romans. When we come to such hard texts, we can either skip across the surface, ignoring all the difficult spots and words, or we can dig.

- The first option—skipping across the surface—is a dangerous choice for us that we must refuse. Hovering over the top of a Biblical text, looking for any little easy nugget that we can preach or hold onto, is dangerous *because* we never fully understand the passage or even the little nuggets that we try to redeem for devotional value. In doing so, nothing prevents us from taking God's Word in an entirely different direction than God intended. That is, our application can twist and pervert God's Holy Word, leading to our own destruction!
- The second option—to dig—is much better. Having said that, it will not be easy. Digging is dirty and it takes sweat and labor. Yet, often digging yields buried treasure! Ask our OT prof at VBTS what you can find when you begin digging around in the soil. He is spending his summer digging in Israel, searching for archaeological treasures. The same is true, men and women, if we roll up our sleeves and apply our minds to prayerful study of difficult passages of scripture. These scriptures contain greater rewards than any archaeological dig!

So, we begin this difficult passage, looking at the contrast between Adam and Jesus.

- Paul begins by starting into a contrast in verse 12 that he does not finish.
- After beginning the contrast, Paul offers two important parenthetical comments that take up verses 13–14 and 15–17.
- Once those comments are given, Paul returns to the contrast by restating its first half and then finally finishing it in verses 18–19.
- With the contrast fully complete, Paul ends with an important theological explanation in verses 20–21. He'll continue to develop this theological explanation about law and grace in chapters 6 and 7.

Now, we are going to take two sermons to cover this passage. Some might respond with bewilderment (*Why so slow?*), but I noticed that John Piper took five sermons to get through 5:12–21 and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones took nine. So, I will take *only* two! 😊

### a. Unfinished contrast (12)

Let's start with the “unfinished contrast” in verse 12. **Read it.**

This unfinished sentence (“*just as—*”) has four important parts.

#### 1) The entrance of sin (12a) – <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man*

Its first line describes the entrance of sin into the human world.

- There was a time when no sin was in our perfect world.
- But then sin was introduced in the Garden through the temptation from Satan.

In our passage, however, the entrance of sin, however, is attributed to one man.

- Thirteen times in the last half of chapter 5, Paul uses the word “one” to describe the action of one man.
- **Read them.**
  - On five occasions, it is used of Jesus.
  - The other eight point to Adam.

Now, there are some people, like Peter Enns, who deny a literal, historical Adam in Genesis.

- They say Adam is mythical.
- It's a story.
- He wasn't real, but this is a story to impart important truths about God.
- There are huge problems with this, however.
- A significant one being that it is extremely difficult (*impossible!*) to maintain a literal, historical Jesus, if you do not maintain a literal, historical Adam.
- If Adam is mythical, then so is Jesus!
- But, to borrow the words of Paul, “God forbid” that we should ever hold to that!

Instead, Paul talks in verse 12 about the entrance of sin through the one man, Adam. Thus, this text describes the “original sin” of the historical Adam in this passage.

#### 2) The entrance of death (12b) – *and death through sin*

But the passage involves not only “original sin;” it also uncovers “original death.” That is, Paul moves next to consider the entrance of death. In this passage, Paul describes twin alien powers—sin and death—that affect the human race.

More specifically, death had its entrance into the world through this one sin.

- This phrase can be translated, “And through *the* sin, *the* death.”
- After Adam's fall in the Garden, the seed of death was implanted into the human race.

- The Genesis account describes it this way: “Dying, you will die!”
- So, because of “original sin,” humanity also experienced “original death.”
  - Death follows sin as its fixed consequence.
  - Because Adam sinned, people began dying.

### 3) The universality of death (12c) – *and so death spread to all men*

But then Paul advances to tell us something more about death in the next phrase. He says, “and so death spread to all men” (καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν). This describes the universality of death.

- The word “spread” (διήλθεν) was sometimes used of *journeying through* or *passing through* a region in travel.
- Other times, it was used of a sword *piercing through* to the inward parts of people or of news of Jesus *spreading through* an entire region.
- In this passage, it speaks of death *thoroughly spreading through* “all men”—all human beings.

And experience further demonstrates that this is true!

- We live in a world of cemeteries.
- Death is universal.
- It affects every person!
  - Apart from the return of the Lord, every man, woman, boy, and girl will die.
- Death, however, is not only universal, it is also total.
  - In verse 10, we read about *physical* death, but later, in verses 17–21, Paul contrasts death with “*eternal* life.”
  - Thus, this death that he describes likely includes both *physical* death (*termination*) and *eternal* death (*i.e., spiritual death; eternal punishment in hell*).
  - As a result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden, death spread all throughout them and any natural offspring that would come from this fallen couple.
  - Like a terminal disease, death now universally affected the entire human race so that Paul can say in other places that we are “born in sin” or that we are “dead in trespasses and sins.”<sup>149</sup>

### 4) The universality of sin (12d) – *because all sinned—*

But that leaves us with at least one important question: “**Why is death universal?**”<sup>150</sup>

- Have you ever asked your neighbor (*an unbeliever*) that question?
- **Why do people die?**

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. Eph 2:1.

<sup>150</sup> Naselli draws the readers attention to this question and then explains that the final part of verse 12 answers that question. Naselli, “Romans,” 73.

- **Why does everyone die?**

- Try it!
- See what they can come up with!
- Normally, the answers to this question are quite unsatisfactory.

But we are not left to find answers from our neighbors! Paul answers that question in the next line—the final part of verse 12. He says that death spreads to all men “because all sinned” (ἐφ’ ὃ πάντες ἥμαρτον).

- Behind the mystery of universal death lies universal sin.
- That is, all humanity dies because all humanity sinned.
- No matter how we take it, Paul’s point is that humanity experiences “universal death” *because of* “universal sin.”

**But what exactly does “all sinned” mean?** Well, that is a difficult question and there have been several different proposals for its meaning.<sup>151</sup> We could spend the rest of the sermon just answering that question, but we would never get out of verse 12!

In context, however, I suggest that Paul means that “all sinned” in the one “sin” of the first man, Adam.

- That is, as the head or representative of the human race—as both the biological and corporate representative of humanity—All humanity sins in Adam’s sin.

But that does not normally sit well with *individualistic* westerners! So, we ask questions or make objections like: “**How can God justly charge to my account Adam’s sin?**” “**How can God punish me for Adam’s sin?**”

I would like to respond in three ways.

- **First, this is a problem for westerners only.** Other countries and peoples with tribal heads or monarchical leaders do not normally have any problems with this. They are set up culturally to accept how one leader (*tribal chief, king*) can function as the decision-maker for the whole people. We are disadvantaged with our individualistic, self-centered culture from interpreting this. We are an independent people. We cannot easily see how “what someone else does affects me!” But, men and women, embrace scripture and not societal

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<sup>151</sup> Scholars have presented no less than four answers to this question. First, **the pelagian view** is that Adam’s sin only affected himself and that each person is innocent until he or she personally sins. In this view, Adam is the first sinner, and every person follows his example. This view should be rejected because it does not cohere with what the scriptures say (cf. Psa 51:5; Eph 2:3). Second, **the Arminian view** is that Adam passed down the evil tendency to sin to us. Only when men consciously and voluntarily follow those tendencies does God impute them as sin to the individual. All personally, eventually consent to their inborn sinful tendencies with sinful acts. Adam’s sin, however, puts us all in the classification of “sinners” regardless of our own personal sins (v. 19). Third, **the seminal view** of the passage has the entire human race naturally, genetically in Adam (cf. Heb 7 and 1 Cor 15:22). In other words, we were in the loins of Adam when he sinned and thus are condemned as part of Adam. This might also be called the genetic view of original sin. Finally, others take **the federal headship view**. Adam is the head or representative for the entire group—all humanity. He was the covenant or corporate head for human beings and made a choice that condemned us all. Choosing between the third and final views is perhaps not necessary. Naselli explains, “Views three and four are not incompatible.... Adam is both the physical or biological head of all humans *and* the federal or covenantal head who represents all humans.” Naselli, “Romans,” 75.

values that you have been taught. Does this passage teach original sin and its condemnation of all people? If so, embrace it.

- **Second, at the time of Adam and Eve’s sin, they are the only living human beings on the planet.** So, when God responds to their sins, he condemns the whole race—both Adam and Eve. Consequently, as sin and death-bearing people, any offspring that they produce naturally is also sin and death-bearing.
- **Third, we normally only struggle with transferring (*reckoning; imputing; crediting*) Adam’s sin and not the positive solution found in Jesus—the transferring (*reckoning; imputing; crediting*) of Jesus’s righteousness.** I know that the new perspective on Paul denies this, but historically Protestants do not have any problem with Jesus’s righteousness becoming our own. We love **2 Cor 5:21**: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* It seems to me, however, that Paul is making the larger case in Rom 5 that just as the sin of one man was transferred to us, so too the obedience (*righteousness*) of one man was transferred to those who believe in him. *In other words, it’s inconsistent and stubborn for us to believe that Jesus’s righteousness can be our own if we do not believe that Adam’s sin is our own as well!*

All humans are thus sinners and subjects of death because of original sin.

- We lie because we are liars.
- We commit immorality because we are immoral.
- And we are sinners, foremost and foundationally, because of Adam.

So, Paul begins a contrast about the actions of the first man, Adam. His actions led to twin alien predators—sin and death—killing and damning every human being. But Paul does not immediately finish the contrast. It will not be until verse 18 that he picks it up again to show how our great hero—Jesus—frees us from sin and death. Now, Paul does not pause *because* he is confused or loses his bearings. No, that will not do! He is a spokesman for God who produces inspired words in this text!

You see, God has good reasons to introduce two significant, extended, parenthetical comments in verses 13–17.

- b. **Parenthetical comment (13–14)** – <sup>13</sup> *For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.* <sup>14</sup> *Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

The first parenthesis includes verses 13 and 14 and involves further comments about universal death. ***Let’s read those verses.***

Now, this is quite a challenging text! ***What does it mean and what is Paul’s main point?*** Well, let’s start with what we do know! We do know that Paul speaks of “death reigning” in this text (v. 14a). That is, the parenthesis is about “universal death” at least the “universal death” of people who existed in the world between Adam and Moses. Paul wants to consider what happened to people who lived in the few thousand years between Adam and Moses.

- The ***simple*** answer is they all died!
- But his argument—the way he gets there—is more ***complex***.

- Highlighting a few phrases will show how this argument is mysterious and complex:
  - In verse 13, Paul says, “But sin is not counted where there is no law.” ***What does that mean? What are the implications of thinking that people without God’s laws are not held accountable for their sin?***
  - Then, in verse 14, he says, “Even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.” Adam knew God’s law. God told him exactly what he could not do! But Adam stepped over that boundary and ate the forbidden fruit. ***But what does this passage mean when it describes people from Adam to Moses as not sinning in the same way—stepping over boundaries they knew God’s laws forbid? And why does Paul mention these people?***

Now, I think there are two good ways that we can explain this text (*there are a great number of bad ways to explain this text as well!* 😊). Only one of these two ways is correct. I lean toward the second, but many prefer the first.

- #1: God’s implicit law condemns

There is a way to understand this text that has people dying from Adam to Moses *because* they have God’s law in other forms than the Law of Moses.

- So, verse 13 explains that “sin” was in the world before Moses.
  - All you have to do is to read Genesis to get a picture of this.
  - After Adam, humans were sinning!
    - Cain killed his brother Abel.
    - Later, God saw the great wickedness of the whole population, their thoughts were evil continuously.
    - Later, humans built a tower so they could be like God.
    - Still later, Sodom and Gomorrah were inflamed with immorality and homosexuality so that God could not find even ten righteous people in the city.
  - Sin was in the world!
- Yet, God does not count or reckon one’s own sins if he does not have law (v. 13b).
  - Paul continues, however, by saying that even people who did not have God’s written law in the Law of Moses (*or God’s laws spoken to them like Adam*) were still held accountable for their sin (v. 14).
  - That is, they *still* died.
  - So, the implied point here is that ***these people***—these generations of people who were not aware of Moses’s law—***still had God’s law in other forms.***
  - They knew better *because* of God’s law being made know to them through 1) his oral law being passed down from others and 2) creation and 3) the conscience.

In summary, everyone has God’s law in some form. There is no person who has no law. Consequently, all people are held accountable for their sin.

- #2: Adam’s sin condemns

But there is a better way to understand the passage—a way that is more in line with the larger point that Paul is making about *how* Adam’s original sin condemns the entire human race.

Paul considers a group of people who were not stepping over clearly defined boundaries that they received directly from God.

- The people who lived between Adam and Moses did not have the Bible.
- Neither did they have the Law of Moses—God’s holy law given to Moses found in the first five books of the Bible.
- The Law of Moses clearly articulated what God’s people should do and not do!
- Yet, before that, people were still sinning. That is the point of v. 13a.
- But God was not counting or reckoning their sin against them because they were doing so in ignorance of God’s written revelation (cf. v. 13b).
  - This does not mean that they weren’t sinning (see v. 14b – *even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam*) or that God was not punishing them for their murder, and pride, and immorality.
    - Genesis reveals that!
  - Instead, God was not counting their sin against them in his eternal records.
    - In God’s calculations, He was not figuring their ignorant sins against them.
  - Ok. ***So, what are the implications of that? Does that mean they all were free—that they all went to heaven—that they all gain eternal life?***
    - Well, no.
    - ***What then?***
    - ***What do they get?***
      - Well, death! They all died!
        - ***How is that true?***
        - ***How is that just?***
          - Well, Adam’s sin condemned the entire human race.
          - That is, the sin of Adam is enough to bring all the consequences of sin, including death, reigning down on all human beings.

In other words, Paul offers a brief parenthetical passage, to explain that even people who did not have the Law of Moses were condemned because Adam’s sin condemns everyone! Or to use the exact words of Paul later in the text: “One trespass led to condemnation for all people” (v. 18a; *even if they did not violate an explicit command from God like Adam because they did not have the Law*).

The main idea of verses 12–14 is that sin and death universally reign over all humanity. It is, perhaps, good for us to sit on this for a week! Sin and death—twin tyrannical villains—control all humanity because of Adam’s original sin. This will help us understand more about the universality of sin and death all around us. This is what explains everything around us!

Next week, we will learn much about our hero—Jesus—who overcomes sin and death and fixes everything for those who believe in him! His act is superior—better, stronger, greater—than Adam’s because he is able to deal with sin and death. His work is greater because it is harder to clean up a mess than to make one.

Think about your bedroom. Some of us are gifted in making a mess in our room! It does not take long—maybe 5 minutes—and things can greatly devolve. But then, after some time, you have to clean it up and it takes hours! Correcting or cleaning up a mess is far harder and that is what Jesus did. That is what Paul describes here.

So, sin and death reign in the first part of this section, but Jesus is coming in the text. In our final benediction, we will consider more about Jesus as well.

Last week, we considered the effects of the sin of the first man, Adam.

- We saw this in **Rom 5:12–14**, where Paul begins a contrast that he does not immediately finish only to introduce a parenthetical comment about how death reigned even over people who did not have the Law of Moses.
- The point of these first three verses in our passage was to demonstrate just how bad Adam made things.
- Because of his original sin, twin tyrannical evil rulers enslaved and damned the world.
- These rulers were sin and death!
- Consequently, in these three verses, there is no hope—all sinned and death reigns.

This week, however, we move to the final part of this passage to see something else reigning.

- In 5:21, Paul describes “grace” and “life” as the new rulers, reigning “through righteousness leading to eternal life.”
- So, within verses 15–21, Paul describes how grace and life come to reign in place of sin and death, and the answer has to do with the actions of one other man—the greatest man—Jesus.
- Whereas sin and death ruled over all humanity in the old age of Adam, grace and life now reign because of Jesus.
- So, this text reveals the replacement of two sinister rulers with two benevolent ones. This is a true analogy for how things really are because of Jesus. Maybe you have seen a movie where an evil queen is replaced by a kind, gracious, warm ruler. This text tells a story like that!

In this brief sermon today, we will consider how Jesus’s work did this. We will now work through the remaining sections of the chapter to show how Jesus replaced sin and death. Let’s begin with the 2<sup>nd</sup> parenthesis.

- c. **Parenthetical comment (15–17)** – <sup>15</sup> *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.* <sup>16</sup> *And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.* <sup>17</sup> *For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

The main point of this second parenthesis involves a contrast between “the free gift” (τὸ χάρισμα) and “the trespass” (τὸ παράπτωμα). The gift of God through Jesus is no mere equivalent to Adam’s sin.

### ***But why are they different?***

- They are different *because* of the effect that their acts brought.
- Judgment and condemnation were the results of one man's false step.
- Christ's act, however, was able to overcome countless numbers of trespasses and his act was able to bring justification—being made right with God!
- Thomas Schreiner describes this contrast between the effects of each man's acts well. He writes, "It is one thing to blemish what is beautiful, but it is much harder to set straight what is already crooked."<sup>152</sup>
  - When I was growing up, my grandfather taught me how to shoot bow and arrow. I loved it!
  - To get better at shooting, we would sometimes go to 3-D archery shoots where you would shoot targets in the woods and compete with others our age.
  - Well, I remember the thrill of getting a new half dozen or dozen aluminum arrows.
    - They were perfect; that is, until you missed a target and hit a stone or a tree or something hard in the woods.
    - Then the arrows would bend, and they would not be as accurate at all.
    - You could look down the arrow and see exactly where it bent.
    - In some case, if you were careful, you could try to bend it back straight.
    - You had to be careful, however, because it was so easy to introduce a new bend into the arrow.
    - If you did not bend it in the perfect spot, then the arrow would have two bends and be even less reliable.
    - In short, it was about impossible to take a bent arrow and make it straight again!

Adam's work brought destruction, but Jesus can make us right again.

Now, verse 17 contains an important note that one must keep in mind throughout the rest of the passage.

- The beginning of the verse has "death" reigning, but the end of the verse has someone entirely different reigning because of Jesus.
- "Those who receive the abundance of God's grace" are those who reign.
- This means that it is those who receive or accept God's grace in Christ who are benefited.

Once these things are understood, we can proceed to the contrast between Adam and Jesus in verses 18–19. ***Let's look at those verses.***

- d. **Renewed contrast (5:18–19)** – <sup>18</sup> *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* <sup>19</sup> *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

In verses 18 and 19, Paul finally finishes the contrast that he began in verse 12. He summarizes all that he said in that verse, with the phrase "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men." There

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<sup>152</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 284.

can be no doubt that the “one trespass” he considers is the first sin of the first man, Adam. The sin by which all men and women died and fell into condemnation and judgment.

But when things turn to Christ’s work, interpreters sometimes run into problems. The problems begin with Paul’s descriptions of Jesus’s work. He calls it “one act of righteousness.” **What does this mean? Why “one act”?**

- Let me first say that this text does not directly answer the question!
- The only textual clue is the mention of the one act of Adam.
- The one act of Adam is his original sin or trespass and that likely leads Paul to describe Jesus’s work as one act as well.
- If I were to choose one act of Jesus, I would probably identify it as his death or resurrection—the core components of the gospel itself.
- Instead, however, this is probably Paul’s way of “treating the entire life and ministry of Jesus as a single whole—as one great act of righteousness.”<sup>153</sup>

Then, in verse 18, we read that it leads to justification and life “for all men,” but in verse 19, Paul concludes that “many” (*a numerous, great amount*) will be made righteous. So, which is it? **Are “all people” justified by Jesus’s work or “many people”?**

- This has perplexed theologians throughout the years.
- Some have even articulated that it teaches **universalism**.
  - For instance, Karl Barth wrote that all humanity is or will be saved.
- **So, how do we answer this?** Well, I see two possibilities.
  - **First, it *might* be that “all” in verse 18 refers to the sufficiency of Jesus’s act in providing the basis for justification for every person.**
    - In other words, Jesus’s work is sufficient for all (v. 18; *the all*), but applied only to believers (v. 19; *the many*).
    - This view of Christ’s act is then consistent with how many describe the effects of Jesus’s death and resurrection on all people and the elect.
    - His shed blood is sufficient for all but applied to the many (*Emeraldian view of the atonement*).
  - **Second, it *might* be that “all” refers to “all those in Christ.”**
    - Verse 17 already expressed that this grace is not dispensed universally.
    - It is only to “those who receive” it.
    - This takes the word “all” seriously but allows verse 17 to help us understand that Paul sees Jesus’s righteousness being applied to those who “receive” it and are thus those “in Christ.”
    - A parallel passage is also helpful here. **Listen to 1 Cor 15:21–23:**

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<sup>153</sup> Excerpt from John Piper’s fourth sermon on Rom 5:12–21, preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at this coming those who belong to Christ.

- At first it is “all,” and then we learn that all is “those who belong to Christ.”
- That is, Paul has two groups in mind—“all in Adam”—all humanity, and “all in Christ”—all believers.

While I hold to the first view theologically, in this passage, I think the second view is better. There are enough indications in the Romans passage (*and the 1 Corinthians passage!*) that Paul has two groups in mind—*humanity in Adam and new humanity in Jesus*.

So, here is the heart of the passage and the point of the sermon today.

- It does not matter how much or how little sin you have committed. This text is about how devastating just one sin is! Especially when conducted with God’s holy perfection. Jesus is *the* way for you to be justified—to be made right with God.
  - Whether you have told one lie or 1,000... you need him!
  - Whether you have lusted or you have been immoral and adulterous...
  - Whether you have coveted or stolen or gossiped or slandered...
  - All men and women, boys and girls here today, need Jesus!
- Will you **receive** or **reject** him?
- Will you **believe** in him today and **turn** from your sin?
  - I urge you, I plead with you, while there is still time: **Trust in Jesus** for all that He has done for you! There may be some people here, who are not truly genuine.

Now, let’s finish the chapter. Paul closes with a final theological explanation. **Let’s read verses 20–21.**

- e. **Theological explanation (5:20–21)** – <sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In verse 20, we are introduced to another character—the law.

- We have already seen that Adam plunged all humanity into condemnation under sin and death.
- Now, we see a secondary or subordinate character—the law.
  - Now, Paul gives here only one of the reasons that the Law of Moses came into this world.
  - This reason, however, would have been shocking to the Jewish people.
  - No doubt, most Jews likely believed that God gave them the law to **decrease** or **restrain** sin.
  - “Rather than restraining sin, however, the law actually increases the desire to sin.”<sup>154</sup>
- Once we are made aware of ways that a holy God is offended at our thoughts, and words, and actions, it is our nature to sin more and more.

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<sup>154</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 248.

- That is, we are drawn to those forbidden things.

But God's purposes in giving the law do not stop there.

- The final part of verse 20 explains, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more."
- That is, God's purposes were more ultimately to reveal the splendors of his grace and kindness to us!
- The law made matters worse, so we were thoroughly condemned in sin upon sin so that Paul can say in verse 21 that sin was reigning in the sphere or realm of death.
- All around us is death and sin is king!
- But then, grace came, and it reigns "through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 21).
- I like how Tom Schreiner says it, "Death may have reigned in the old age, but now a greater power has invaded the world. Now grace reigns through [Christ's] righteousness."<sup>155</sup>

***Will not you turn today to experience God's grace?***

- Grace and life make much better rulers than sin and death and you can only experience them "through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- As we close, with heads bowed and eyes closed, I ask: Will you be joined to Jesus today? Why would you remain in sin? Your sin and your desires promise joy and fulfillment, but it will be emptiness and devastation. Your sin destroys harmony with God and makes you the subject of God's wrath against sin. Yet, God loves you and sent His only son for you to rescue you from "sin" and "death" and "hell." Jesus did not die on a cross because it was a noble thing. No, he was tortured in sheer agony and was subject to sharp pain that destroyed Him and crushed Him because he knew there was no other way for you! In this quiet moment I urge you to pray: "Lord, I believe in you. I hate my sin, and I want you. I believe that you died for my sin, and you were raised by God- so that I could be freed. Save me Lord today, I want to belong to you!"

**3. It frees from the captivity of sin and the law (6:1–7:25).**

Well, it is good to be back in Romans again.

- The last two sermons in Romans, we considered a contrast between two men—the first man who ever lived and the greatest man who ever lived.
- The first man, *Adam*, *enslaved* us to sin and the greatest man, *Jesus*, *sets us free* from sin's penalty.

Now, at the end of Romans 5, Paul declared that the grace of the gospel delivers us from the condemnation of sin and the law—twin sinister powers—two evil, wicked rulers who *reigned* and *enslaved* all humanity. But because of Jesus, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Because of the greatest man Jesus, we are free from the reign or rule of sin!

So, as we move forward into Romans 6 & 7, Paul answers three possible objections that his opponents might offer about such amazing grace. Paul marks out each section with the same question "What then?" (*check these out in 6:1, 15; 7:7*)

Opponents might question:

- Does that encourage sin (6:1–14)?
- Does that allow sin (6:15–7:6)?

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<sup>155</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 296.

- Does that make the law itself sinful (7:7–25)?

Answering these objections, allows Paul to elaborate more fully on how the gospel delivers us not only from the *penalty* of sin, but from its *rule* over humanity. So, we will consider the first part of Romans 6 today and it will be about “sin.”

**a. Answering Objections: Instead of encouraging sin, the gospel makes us dead to it (6:1–14).**

This chapter is one of the most important chapters on “sin” anywhere in the Bible. The word “sin” is found 17 times in this chapter. No other chapter in the whole Bible compares (*the closest is Rom 7!*). So, we are going to take three sermons to work through this chapter because of how very important it is for us!

**1) “Just the Facts!”—the way things really are (6:1–11).**

Now, we start today with verses 1–11, where Paul lays out the ways things really are. These verses contain Paul’s concise explanation of the facts of believers and sin.

Paul begins with an objection his opponents might raise against him:

***“Well, Paul if it’s all of grace, then we can live like godless people! We can live like the Devil. That is what your gospel teaches! Right, Paul?”***

“Some might argue that 5:20–21 necessarily leads to 6:1, so Paul anticipates how some might misuse that truth.”<sup>156</sup>

- “Is it the more I sin, the more grace is dispensed?”
- “Is it that grace so thoroughly deals with all my sins that I should not worry about future sinfulness?”

Let’s see how Paul raises the objection in verse 1.

**a) Objection Raised (1) – <sup>1</sup> *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> question in verse 1 demonstrates the true or genuine issue at hand. “If *when* we sin grace abounds, then shall we sin more.”

That is the hard question that Paul answers. Paul does not shy away from answering his opponent’s objections. He does not back down because we are talking about what the gospel of Jesus Christ is *actually* like!

**b) Answer Given (2) – <sup>2</sup> *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?***

Now, Paul’s succinct answer is found in verse 2. ***Let’s look at that.***

He says, “No way!” “God forbid!” That is the classic Pauline way to say, “That is the entirely wrong way to think about grace!”

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<sup>156</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 82.

But then—in the form of a question—Paul punches back! He says, “How can we—who died to sin—still live in it?” That is, he states that the fundamental reality that his opponents (*and everyone else for that matter!* 😊) must know about believers and sin is that they are “dead” to it.

Men and women, this is the most important point of the whole sermon. ***If you are a genuine believer in Jesus Christ, you are dead to sin!*** Got it? You are what? Dead to Sin.

But what does that mean? What does it mean to be dead to sin?

- **Well, some people believe that this is something that believers must believe or appropriate for themselves for it to be so.**
  - This is something, they say, that is potentially true for anyone who yields himself enough to these things.
  - If we just believe it hard enough—that we are dead to sin—then it becomes true for us!
    - But that is not what this passage is saying!
    - This is not something that we have to hope for or strive for or work for.
    - No, no, no.
  - This is something that is true for all believers. We are dead to sin!
    - Do not let any expert—whether Keswick or Charismatic or Arminian—tell you otherwise!
    - Do not let any new book or old book tell you this!
    - Do not let any preacher—no matter how cool he is—tell you that this passage teaches us that this can potentially be true for believers if they believe it hard enough or yield themselves enough to it!
  - The Bible says, “We have ‘died to sin.’”
  - Now, I think that *many* people say this because they are dealing with the ongoing struggle that we have with sin.
  - We are supposed to be dead to sin, but it does not sometimes feel that way!
    - I mean, “Has that been your experience with sin this week?”
    - Have you felt no attraction—no pull to sin—because you are dead to it?
    - Does this mean that sin does not affect us?
    - We cannot feel anything anymore!
    - Well, the answer is that this is not what Paul means by death to sin.
      - It does not mean that *or* why would Paul have to say: “Do not let sin rule over you” *and* “Do not present your members to sin as weapons for unrighteousness”?
      - Instead, the context points us in a different direction!
- **In Romans 5, Paul portrays “sin” as a ruler and explains that unbelievers in Adam live in the reign or dominion of the tyrannical ruler sin.**

- So, to be “dead to sin” means that we are dead to the realm or rule of sin.
- Sin does not have authority over us.
- All throughout Romans, sin is personified.
  - Sinclair Ferguson says that Sin is a king who reigns (5:21; 6:12), a general who employs our bodies as weapons (6:13), and employer who pays wages (6:23), and a master who owns us (6:14).
  - You see, Sin is an evil, wicked King who not only rules and reigns and enslaves, he kills.
    - That is right!
    - King Sin uses his henchman—Death—to eventually kill all in his realm. You are his until you die!
  - But Paul says that if you are a genuine believer in Jesus, “sin” is not your King anymore because you have experienced a death. We will learn more about that later!

So, Paul asks, “How can we still live it?” We are no longer under its authority. That is his succinct answer.

The story of Augustine’s conversion is remarkable. Before his conversion, Augustine was a very immoral man. But one day, God saved him, and he was forever different. Soon after his conversion, Augustine was walking down one of his normal routes and up above him called out one of his former lovers—a woman well-known for her immorality. As he was passing by, she called out: “Augustine, Augustine, it is I!” And he responded, “Yes, but it is not I!” Sin was no longer his ruler!

That is Paul’s short answer here.

### c) Answer Expounded (3–11)

Paul’s short answer, however, needs to be expounded. We are dead to sin, but what are the implications of that and how did that happen for believers? That is what verses 3–11 are about. Paul expounds on this idea and elaborates in three ways.

- **How are we dead to sin (3–5)?** <sup>3</sup> *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* <sup>4</sup> *We were buried therefore with him into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* <sup>5</sup> *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

First, he explains how this is true for us—how we have died to sin. **Let’s look at verses 3 through 5.**

Now, Paul’s answer to how we have died to sin comes from his theology of Christian baptism.

- Baptism is a way for believers to identify themselves with Jesus their Lord.

- Baptism does not save us, but it is a special way—a special ordinance of the church—whereby we declare externally to others what has already happened in our heart.
- We believe in Jesus alone for our salvation and we want others to know that we identify with Jesus our Lord.
- Now, to go deeper, **when** we are baptized into Christ Jesus, we are baptized into his death.<sup>157</sup>
  - That is, we identify with his death on the cross.
  - You see, our baptism is symbolic of something.
  - It is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
  - The old commentators, Sanday and Headlam, said it well: “That plunge beneath the waters was like a death; the moment’s pause while they swept on overhead was like a burial; the standing aright once more in air and sunlight was a species of the resurrection.”<sup>158</sup>
- So, how did we die? We died “in Jesus.” Our union with Jesus and our baptism pictures that!
- I encourage you this morning, “Remember your baptism.” You told everyone that you died with Jesus!
  - Remember what you once were and remember what God did in Jesus to change you!
  - If you are a believer and you have not been baptized, what are you waiting for?
  - Why would you wait to identify yourself with Jesus’s death.
- We can fill up this pool next week and it will even be warm by then!
- Today, we will partake in communion that symbolically remembers the death of Jesus, but the other ordinance pictures our Jesus death to sin and our similar death to sin.

Now, Paul continues to elaborate on our death to sin in verses 6–7. **Let’s read them.**

- **Why were we made dead to sin (6–7)?** <sup>6</sup> *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* <sup>7</sup> *For the one who has died has been set free from sin.*

In these verses, Paul describes our death to sin in another way and answers more specifically why God made us dead to sin.

Now, the most difficult part of verses 6 and 7, is determining what Paul means by two descriptions:

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<sup>157</sup> Explore more fully other texts that describe baptism or being baptized “into” (εἰς) someone. Some might think that this is not describing “water” baptism, but “spirit” baptism instead. Further consider these things the next time you work through Romans.

<sup>158</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 162.

- **“Our old self”** (ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) – This literally means “our old man.” This is the man and woman that we once were—“the person that we used to be in Adam.”<sup>159</sup> This is not a continuing part of us as joined with the new man. These are not two natures that we currently have. It is not our old nature and new nature duking things out. Instead, the old self refers to us in entirety when we were in Adam.<sup>160</sup> What we were in Adam remains no more! It was metaphorically crucified with Jesus. When we identified with Jesus and were united to him, his death is our death to sin. So, Paul says that our old man (*i.e., our connection to the old humanity in Adam*) was crucified with Christ in order that our whole enslaved person might be put to death.
- **“The body of sin”** (τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας) – But then we come across another difficult description. Paul says that this happened “in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing.” But what is the “body of sin”? This is a strange description in English, but I think its meaning is fairly simple. It seems best to take this as the whole old person enslaved in sin. Later, in Rom 7:24, Paul describes the “body of this death.” To keep things consistent, that is Paul’s description of the whole person enslaved by death. So, Paul says that our old man in Adam was crucified with Jesus so that our body enslaved by sin would be brought to nothing. That enslaved being is crucified and our former being enslaved by sin no longer exists!

Now, that leads us to Paul’s even deeper answer for why we were made dead to sin. We were crucified with Jesus “so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (v. 6) and be “set free from sin” (v. 7). Simply stated, the whole reason this is true for us is that we would no longer be enslaved to sin as our master.

- **What does death to sin also include (8–11)?**<sup>8</sup> *Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*<sup>9</sup> *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.*<sup>10</sup> *For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.*<sup>11</sup> *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

But then Paul continues to elaborate on death to sin in verses 8–11. **Let’s read them.**

Verses 8–11 introduce something only hinted at before. We not only were identified or united with Jesus’s death in baptism, but we are also united with his life.

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<sup>159</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 176.

<sup>160</sup> Jason Meyer describes two main views of the old man—the ontological view and the relational view. “The ontological view asserts that when Christians experience salvation, they receive a ‘new nature,’ and the ‘old nature’ receives a mortal blow. Even though the old nature ‘was crucified,’ it remains alongside the new nature. Cranfield states that ‘our fallen human nature’ received crucifixion, but this fact does not imply the destruction of the old man because the ‘old fallen nature lingers on in the believer.’ ... The relational view asserts that the old man stands for who we were in Adam.... This view sates that the cross did not ‘kill’ the ‘old nature’; the cross put an end to our relational ties to Adam. One connection was severed and a ‘new’ one was established. The cross cancels our former relationship with Adam, and faith in Christ initiates a new representative connection with Christ so that the believer is no longer ‘in Adam,’ but ‘in Christ.’... The old man once again is humanity in Adam, while the new man is humanity in Christ.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 41–42.

- In verse 8, Paul says, “We will also live with him” (*maybe a reference to our future resurrection life or our newness of life now*).
- Then, in verse 9–10, he says that Jesus was temporally subjected to death’s rule when he died once for all, but that now he “lives to God.”
  - Now, this does not mean that Jesus did not always live “to God.”
  - While that has always been true of Jesus, Paul wants to make a point about his resurrection life to also make a further point about our life (cf. 10b, 11b).
- Now, when it says, “lives to God” this means that he lives “for God” or “for God’s glory.”
- So, our death to sin not only means that we are dead to sin’s rule, it also means that we are now alive for God.
- We are dead to sin and alive for God.

This is the way that things truly are! Those are the facts!

The reality is that if you are a believer, you are a new creature. You need to renew your mind and consider these things to be true and live like you are. If you are a Christian, your old man—what you were in Adam—is crucified—it’s dead! So, you must, by faith, count (*to calculate, to take into account*) this true for yourself.

- You should not just pretend that this is true.
- You must bring your mind under control and tell yourself the truth about the gospel.
- You have died with Jesus and now are alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- One of the reasons, so many Christians makes to little progress in sanctification is because they do not think properly about themselves and sin.
- This is why so many flounder so badly!

So, men, when you feel “lust” calling out to you this week and making its demands on you, say, “I am dead to you!” “You do not own me!” “I am different now!” “I am alive for God!”

When we feel “sin” (*anger, lying, drunkenness, slander*) crying out to us to do something, know that is not the way things are! **Jesus has freed you from the authority of sin!** When you sin, it’s never because you *have* to, it’s because you *want* to. And may God give us grace to see things properly and fight against sin’s cries to us this week!

## 2) “Just the Obligations!” (6:12–14)

In Romans 6, Paul raises potential objections to his theology of grace and the gospel so that he can answer them. Paul never shied away from difficult questions.

So, he begins by considering whether his gospel of grace means that people should continue in sin so that more grace abounds. His simple answers are “never” *and* “how can people dead to sin continue in it?” That is, since believers are dead to sin’s rule because of being in Jesus, they should not continue in sin. We have have been delivered from one realm—one ruler—to another. These are the facts!

Building off these facts, in verses 12–14, Paul speaks of obligations. It’s “just the facts” (vv. 1–11), then it is “just the obligations” (vv. 12–14). In our text this morning, Paul makes positive and

negative demands of Christians (vv. 12–13) before offering them a final, reassuring promise (v. 14).

So, this sermon will focus on what our obligations are in the Christian life.

- The way Romans 6 begins is with the blessings of being alive to God and dead to sin as a ruler.
- *Genuine* Christianity is unique in its order.
- Every other religion makes you work for forgiveness and blessing.
- *Genuine* Christianity, however, starts with grace—unearned favor from God—and then goes to our obligations.

It is like receiving some tremendous gift that you receive from someone else!

- It is unbelievable.
- You are taken care of for the rest of your life!
- Such an amazing gift normally swells within us a desire to do whatever we can to show gratitude to the gift giver.
  - Christ fought my sin battle 2,000 years ago and won it!
  - I am saved through that entirely.
  - Now, I respond after faith and repentance by obeying these obligations.
- This morning, we will consider how we respond—what our obligations are because we are under grace and not sin.

#### a) The obligations (12–13)

Let's begin. In verses 12 and 13, Paul reveals how Christians must respond to their death to sin in Jesus. These include negative *and* positive commands. We will talk through both categories quickly before we stop to make applications and consider how we can grow from implementing this passage.

Let's begin with two negative obligations in verse 12 and the beginning of verse 13. ***Let's read them.***

- **The negative obligations (12–13a)**

The first negative command—what we must not do—is in verse 12.

- **“Do not let sin reign” (12)** – <sup>12</sup> *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

Since we are “dead to sin” and “alive for God,” we must not let sin reign in our bodies. Paul has already introduced sin and death as political rulers or authorities. Now, he continues with that kind of description of sin and says literally that we must not allow it to “act as king” over us. I would like to point out two things about verse 12.

- First, notice ***where*** we must not allow sin to reign.

- We are not to allow sin to reign in the arena of our “mortal bodies” (τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι).
  - In modern English, we do not normally describe our body as mortal.
  - **What does that mean?**
  - Well, the word “mortal” means “subject to death.”
  - Because of sin, our bodies are going to die or perish.
  - They are not incorruptible, they corrupt.
  - They are not immortal, they are mortal.
  - This is the body that we all have now.
- But, secondly, notice to **what** sin would enslave us.
    - Sin would reign over you with the result that you “obey its passions.”
    - Now, the word “its” refers to “body”.
    - It is not that sin personified enslaves you to its own passions, but sin personified wants to reign over you so that you are enslaved to the passions of your body.
    - These passions or lusts are expounded in other NT passages and include illicit desires for drunkenness, immoral sex, immoral fantasies, sensuality, sorcery, strife, envy, coveting, jealousy, displays of anger, divisions, and other such things.
    - In the NT, these evil lusts come from our **hearts** (Rom 1:24), **bodies** (Rom 6:12), and **flesh** (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16, 24).

So, sin wants control over you and wants to exercise authority over you so that you are enslaved to these evil desires. But God says, “Do not let sin reign in your body.” Sin is a domineering, brutal tyrant who seeks to control you so that you are harmed by your own illicit desires.

- **“Do not offer your body parts to sin as weapons” (13a) – <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.**

But Paul continues with what else we must not do at the beginning of verse 13. **Read it.**

Paul says that we must not present our members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness. Now, two words in this negative command need further comment so that we can fully understand this obligation.

- **First, to what does “your members” (τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν) refer?**

In verse 12, Paul spoke of our entire body that is subject to death and decay. With the words “your members” he speaks of our parts—maybe body parts.

- This likely speaks of more than body limbs, however.
- It involves our limbs, but also our sexual organs and mental and cognitive capacities as well.
- So, it includes our body parts like hands, feet, eyes, ears, tongues, etc., but it also includes our minds.

- **Second, what does “instruments” (ὄπλα) mean?**

This word for “instruments” is a rare word, used only four times other than this verse in the entire NT. Let’s see how it is translated in the other passages. I will underline how the ESV translates it in each passage.

*John 18:3 – So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

*Rom 13:12 – The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.*

*2 Cor 6:7 – By truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left.*

*2 Cor 10:4 – For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*

Having heard these other passages, it seems most likely that this verse could or should be translated “weapons” instead of “instruments.” You know that I like the ESV by it being the standard version from which I have preached these seven years, but I would prefer for it to say “weapons” here instead of “instruments.”

Having considered these two parts of the command, we are now ready to put it all back together. We are not to offer to sin our body parts (*limbs, organs, capacities*) as weapons for unrighteousness. Sin is waging a war against God and holiness and I cannot let my body parts act as weapons that he shoots against God or others (*my sin normally impacts others, they are like arrows that sin shoots at my wife or children or brothers and sisters*) or myself.

- **The positive obligations (13b–c)**

Instead, we must engage in some positives. That is, we have positive obligations with our body and body parts.

- **“Offer yourselves to God” (13b) –** *But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.*

These positive obligations begin in the middle of verse 13. **Read it.**

Our minds, hearts, organs, and limbs belong to God. So, we should continually be offering our whole being to God “for him to use for his just, fair, compassionate purposes.”<sup>161</sup> We cannot be neutral with these things, offering our body to neither sin nor God. You see, “There is no neutral position between service to God or service to sin.”<sup>162</sup> On a similar note, the old puritan, John Owen, said this: “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”

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<sup>161</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 327.

<sup>162</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 386.

Instead of living our lives exclusively refusing every impulse of our body or flesh, we need to engage in the positive counterparts. Refusing sin should be immediately or simultaneously followed by offering ourselves to God.

- **“Offer your body parts to God as weapons” (13c)** – *And your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

That is when Paul takes things a bit farther so that we can see how thoroughly we should be serving God. More specifically, Paul says that we must be presenting our members (*body parts, limbs, organs, and capacities*) to God in service as weapons for righteousness at the end of verse 13.

Having worked through these commands in verses 12–13, I want to consider a way we can incorporate these obligations more into our lives. I want you to imagine starting your days this week by recalling what God says about the members of your body in both negative and positive ways. We will move from the bottom of our feet to the top of our heads.

Body Part/Capacity	Select Scriptures	Implication
Feet	<b>Matthew 18:8</b> – <i>And if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.</i>	<b>What does God want me to do with my feet?</b>  We normally move from place to place with our <u>feet</u> . Some of us might not have fully functioning body parts with disabilities. If so, commit what God has given to you to Him. Many texts, however, describe our feet as leading us to places of evil or sin. Yet, other texts speak of feet carrying us to good places—to do God’s will and to take the gospel to others who have not heard.
	<b>Romans 3:15–17</b> – <i>Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.</i>	
	<b>Proverbs 4:27b</b> – <i>Turn your foot away from evil.</i>	
	<b>Romans 10:15</b> – <i>And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’</i>	
	<b>Acts 26:16</b> – <i>But raise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.</i>	
	<b>Ephesians 6:15</b> – <i>And as shoes for your feet, put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.</i>	

<p><b>Hands</b></p>	<p><b>Acts 2:23</b> – <i>This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.</i></p> <p><b>1 Timothy 1:8–9</b> – <i>The law is not laid down for the just but for ... those who strike their fathers and mothers...</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>1 Corinthians 4:12</b> – <i>And we labor, working with our own hands.</i></p> <p><b>1 Thessalonians 4:10b–12</b> – <i>But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.</i></p> <p><b>2 Thessalonians 3:10–11</b> – <i>For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: ‘If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.’ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.</i></p> <p><b>Ephesians 4:28</b> – <i>Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.</i></p>	<p><b>What does God want me to do with my hands?</b></p> <p><u>Hands</u> can be used sinfully to strike or kill or steal from others. Instead, we must use our hands to work (or else we should <u>not</u> eat) so that our needs are provided and we are in a place where we can share with others.</p>
<p><b>Eyes</b></p>	<p><b>Matthew 5:28–29</b> – <i>But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better to that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>John 4:35</b> – <i>Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?’ Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.</i></p> <p><b>2 Corinthians 4:18</b> – <i>As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.</i></p> <p><b>Psalms 8:3–4</b> – <i>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?</i></p>	<p><b>What does God want me to do with my eyes?</b></p> <p>We must not offer our <u>eyes</u> to sin to lust because that is equivalent to adultery and immorality; instead, we must 1) look around at others who are in need of the gospel, 2) look to the reality of future, heavenly things, and 3) look around at God’s beautiful creation to offer worship to him.</p>

Tongues	<p><b>James 3:5–8</b> – <i>The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed, and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.</i></p>	<p><b>What does God want me to do with my tongue?</b></p> <p>The <u>tongue</u> is impossible to control for sinful human beings in their own strength. Although it is a small member, it is significant. We must not offer our tongues as a weapon to corrupt, deceive, slander, or gossip. Instead, we should use our tongue for God to edify others, minister grace to them, and glorify and worship God.</p>
	<p><b>Ephesians 4:29a</b> – <i>Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths</i></p>	
	<p><b>Ephesians 4:29b</b> – <i>But only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.</i></p> <p><b>Hebrews 13:15</b> – <i>Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.</i></p>	
Ears	<p><b>Matthew 13:15</b> – <i>“For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”</i></p>	<p><b>What does God want me to do with my ears?</b></p> <p>Since I am alive to God, I must listen well to Scripture. While there are many evil things we can listen to, we must be eager to hear God’s Word.</p>
	<p><b>1 Thessalonians 2:13</b> – <i>And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Acts 17:11</b> – <i>They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.</i></p>	
Brain	<p><b>Proverbs 23:7</b> – <i>As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.</i></p>	<p><b>What does God want me to do with my brain?</b></p> <p>Our thoughts lead to action. God wants us to offer our <u>minds</u> to Him to dwell on right and lovely things instead of sinful meditations.</p>
	<p><b>Philippians 4:8</b> – <i>Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.</i></p>	

Imagine using this list on your bed or in your chair in the morning and saying, “God, I am not my own. You bought my entire body and soul with Jesus’s blood. I commit today to use my body for your glory and not surrender it to sin. Help me through the Spirit to live for you today.”

Do this before temptation even hits! Do this when you first feel the allure of temptations in your heart! Do this if temptations hit strong and you are all alone!

Perhaps, you have lived far too long enslaved to sin, using your body parts and capacities as weapons for unrighteousness. May Peter's clear admonition resonate with you this morning. He said, "Live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry" (1 Pet 4:2b–3). You see, living under grace brings obligations. We must use our members as weapons only for righteousness.

**b) The promise (14) – <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.**

Now, to these obligations, Paul attaches a promise. **Look with me at verse 14.**

In this verse, Paul is explaining why we should obey the commands that he has given to us. We should do these because sin will not have dominion over us. Literally, it will not "lord over" (κυριεύσει) us.

Now, this is a promise, but this is not a promise that we will no longer sin.

- If someone tells you that they do not sin, then they are likely not a genuine believer.
- According to 1 John, people who say they have no sin "are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them" (1:8).

Having said that, this is still a promise.

- It is a promise and declaration that sin is not lord over you and will not have lordship over you *because* you have a different Lord.
- Now, Paul actually closes this verse in a different way, by saying that sin will not domineer *or* reign over us because we are not under the law, but under grace.
- Paul will explore this more fully in later texts, but for now we note that the law did not offer people power to battle their own sin.
  - It simply forbids sin and offers incentives to obey.
  - It told us what to do, but it did not give us any internal power to defeat sin.
- Life under the grace of the gospel, however, is different.
  - In such grace, we are also changed and equipped with the Spirit of God so that we are no longer enslaved to sin.
  - As a matter of fact, consider the close parallel between this verse and another found in the NT.

*You are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom 6:14b).*

*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:18)*

This parallelism shows that those who are "under grace" are the ones led by the Spirit. Paul will describe more about the indwelling Spirit who leads us and helps us in Romans 8. For today, let's ask God to help us fulfill the obligations that spring from grace. We are dead to

sin and alive to God. May God help us every day—every morning—this week to present ourselves as weapons to God for righteousness!

**b. Answering Objections: Instead of allowing sin, grace means that we belong to God (6:15–7:6).**

As we come to Romans 6 today, we will consider the next objection that Paul raises against his own grace theology.

He is already anticipated an objection in 6:1 (“*What then?*”) than he answers in 6:2–14. In our passage, he raises a second objection in 6:15 (“*What then?*”) that he answers in 6:16–7:6. We will take two weeks to work through this this second section.

Now, our passage this morning will be quite difficult for us to hear. That is so because it will cut completely across our cultural values. Let me show you!

- First, this passage is about “slavery.”
  - That is Paul’s new metaphor.
  - In the former section, he used baptism to describe our identification and union with Jesus.
  - But now, he used “slavery” as his metaphor, and he has ***a lot*** to say about it!
  - Words for slavery are found in vv. 16 (2x), 17, 18, 19 (2x), 20, 22.
  - Paul talks about slavery eight times in this short text.
  - Now, in our world, “Slavery is regarded as an abomination, unacceptable in *any* circumstances. To be a slave is to be regarded as less than human.”<sup>163</sup>
  - And this is held, perhaps rightfully so, because of all the *ignorant* and *racist* and *abusive* forms of slavery throughout our country’s history and throughout world history.
  - Yet, Paul uses this word not only to describe the way “Sin” acts as our tyrannical master, he also describes God as our master and uses the human analogy to describe our relationship to him.
  - Now, it would be easy for us to reject this whole thing because of all the wicked demonstrations of slavery that this world has ever seen, but that would be to our detriment.
  - In their world, however, “slavery” was not likely a popular subject as well.
  - It has been estimated that 30–40% of the Roman empire was made up of slaves.
  - This experience was quite common in their day, yet Paul still insists on using it to describe our relationship with God through metaphor
  - It has been my earnest prayer this week that 1) we can accept it and that 2) we would believe that He would never be guilty of the ignorant, racist, and abusive things that other masters have done throughout time.
  - No, those wicked slave masters, who have exploited and abused their servants, are better pictured by the master, “Sin,” in this passage.
- Then, to make things even more difficult for us in America to accept, Paul speaks about gaining “freedom” in this passage in a way that unbelievers will not appreciate.
  - In our world today, we are all about “autonomy”—“self-rule”—and we insist that *no one* has the right to judge us for how we conduct ourselves and the choices that we make with how we identity ourselves.
  - That is the “Bible” of our culture!

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<sup>163</sup> Johnson, *Romans*, 107.

- Yet, Paul completely rejects that kind of “freedom” to self-rule in this passage.
  - He does not have a category for a person who is completely free or ruling himself or herself without being under another ruling power.
- Let’s look for what Paul says about “freedom” in this passage.
  - He actually repeats the same phrase twice at the beginning of verses 18 and 22.
  - **Look at it with me:**
    - “And having been *set free* from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (v. 18a)
    - “You have been *set free* from sin and have become slaves of God” (vv. 22a)
  - Paul has two possible masters in this passage and neither one is self!
  - As Doug Moo says, for Paul “There is no such thing as human autonomy.”<sup>164</sup>
  - So, this passage flies in the face of the illusion of human autonomy!
  - People today long to cast off restraints from those who impose authority on them.
  - They want to be free from authorities—from gods—so they can serve their own ego—their own selves.
  - What they do not know, however, is that to serve “one’s own ego is the very essence of slavery to sin.”<sup>165</sup>
  - Self-mastery is a delusion. It is actually bondage to sin!

So, our text today, will fly in the face of cultural values and make the case that we cannot sin *because* being under grace means we are enslaved to God. The point of the sermon will be to remind or inform us that we are set free from sin to function as God’s slaves—to glorify Him in the way we live day by day.

**1) The critic’s questions (6:15a) – <sup>15</sup> What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?**

Paul begins this passage with the critic’s questions in verse 15. **Read it.**

Paul’s two questions pick up a similar criticism to the one he brought up in verse 1.<sup>166</sup>

- In that verse, Paul answers whether believers should sin so *that* they get more grace!
- Remember that?
- If when sin abounds, grace superabounds—If when we sin, we get grace—does that mean we should sin more?
- I mean, “I like grace, and I want more of it, so how do I get more of it?”
- But Paul says, “No way!” “Do not do it!”

Now, Paul raises another objection.

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<sup>164</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 397.

<sup>165</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 323.

<sup>166</sup> Schreiner objects to an older way of looking at the two questions. He says, “No significance should be ascribed to the fact that the tense of the verb in verse 15 is aorist, whereas the verb in verse 1 is present. Verse 1 does not refer to continued sin and verse 15 to particular acts of sin. The aorist in verse 15 is constative and refers to sinning in general.” Schreiner, *Romans*, 329.

- Should we sin because we are under grace (ὑπὸ χάριν) and not under the law (ὑπὸ νόμον)?
- Paul’s critics would certainly think that his grace theology was a “recipe for moral disaster... to put grace alone in place of the law was to remove God’s barrier against sin and to open the floodgates of sin.”<sup>167</sup>

That is the criticism!

## 2) The simple answer (6:15b) – *By no means!*

Paul’s answer to the objection is simple! It is one he has used before. At the end of verse 15, he says, “No way! May it never be!” We should not sin because we are freed from the law and under grace.

## 3) The answer explained (6:16–7:6)

Well, that is Paul’s quick and emphatic answer—“No way!”

But why does he think that? What are his reasons for saying that being under grace instead of the law does not mean we can sin?

- He has two.
- The criticism he just raised had two points to it, including being “under grace” and “under law.”
- So, Paul responds with two paragraphs.
  - He deals first with the grace part (6:16–23) and then the law part (7:1–6) to make two points.

We will look at only the first reason today! It comes in the rest of chapter 6.

### a) Being under grace means that we are slaves of God (6:16–23).

The first reason we should not sin is because being under grace means that we are slaves of God. Now, Paul makes this point by clearly stating a principle in verse 16 before applying it directly to the Romans themselves in the remaining verses. Let’s consider the principle in verse 16. **Read it.**

- **The principle (16)** – <sup>16</sup> *Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

Paul uses a familiar form in this passage by asking the question, “Do you not know?”

- This is his preferred and dramatic way of saying that they should actually know something to be true.
- To this, he adds an analogy—slavery.
- With this analogy, he takes things further to establish a principle.

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<sup>167</sup> Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 352.

- The principle is: The one we obey is the one to whom we are enslaved.

Now, the two masters in this passage are “sin” and “obedience.”

- In the next few verses, these masters are called “sin” and “righteousness” and “God.”
- So, the choices are “sin” on the one side and “obedience/righteousness/God” on the other.
- And the ends of both masters are also stated.
  - Slavery to sin results in “death;” whereas slavery to God results in “righteousness.”

That is the principle that Paul identifies. You are enslaved to the master that you obey!

- **The application (17–18)** – <sup>17</sup> *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,* <sup>18</sup> *and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

But then, in verses 17 and 18, Paul applies this principle to them. This is how his analogy of slavery applies to the Romans themselves. **Let’s read these verses.**

Paul starts by praising God—by literally giving “grace” or “thanksgiving” back to God.

- He will do this again in the famous passage where he exclaims his thanks to God for being delivered from the bondage that he experienced to sin in Rom 7:25.
- Here he gives thanks to God for what He has done in the lives of the Roman believers.

Paul specifically thanks God for two things He has done for the Romans. You can see these in the ESV with the words “have become.” You have become “obedient from the heart” (v. 17b) and “slaves of righteousness” (v. 18b).

- **They have become obedient from the heart.**

So, first, they have become “obedient from the heart.” This expression is a way for Paul to emphasize both the sincerity *and* the depth of what God did to the Roman believers. Although Paul has never been there, he knows that God changed them, and this change began internally. They have been changed from the inside-out so *that* they are now obeying him.

But their genuineness is more fully defined as them rendering heart obedience to something. They follow the “pattern or standard of teaching” to which they have committed. This is important language that often gets overlooked. I want to consider both parts of this expression.

- Let’s start at the back with the word “teaching.”
  - This word is found surprisingly only a few times in the NT.
  - When it is used, it is most often used of Jesus.

- This is something he did, something he gave.
  - In other words, “the teaching” mentioned in the NT is most often “teaching from Jesus.”
  - In texts outside the gospels, it is used rarely, but then to speak of the “apostles’ teaching.”
  - This is teaching that the apostles gave to the early church that confirms with the earlier instruction of Jesus.
- Now, Paul mentions “the teaching” here to show that freedom from the law does not mean that we are lawless.
    - It is not that we now have no moral instruction from God to follow.
    - The Roman believers, who were free from the regulations of the Law of Moses, have committed themselves to “the teaching”—the teaching (διδασκαλία) of Jesus guides them.
    - In their slavery to God, He handed the Roman believers over to obedience to Jesus’s teaching.
- But Paul could have just said “teaching” in Rom 6:17. Instead, he adds the word “pattern” (τύπον) to that.
    - **What does that add?**
    - Well, this is teaching that “molds, shapes, and transforms” those who have committed to it.<sup>168</sup>
    - That is, the teachings of Jesus “mold” and “form” believers.
    - If Paul’s critics were concerned that “God’s standard” has been displaced in the Law from Moses, they can be assured that believers have teaching from someone even greater than Moses.

Believers have a teaching that molds or transforms them!

- **They have become slaves of righteousness.**

They also have been set free from sin to become “slaves of righteousness.” We can see this in verse 18. This means that God changes the loyalties of believers so that they “live in a way that conforms to God’s standards.”<sup>169</sup> To be a slave of righteousness is to be a slave of God.

That is the application. This is how the analogy of slavery relates to the Roman believers. God has changed them so that they now render service to him.

- **The demand (19–23)**

And all this produces one demand—a demand that we have seen before.

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<sup>168</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 336.

<sup>169</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 87.

- **Paul gives the responsibility (19)** – <sup>19</sup> *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

Paul gives this responsibility clearly in verse 19. **Let's read it.**

Paul begins by saying that he recognizes some difficulties with using the analogy of "slavery" when speaking of our relationship to sin and God.

- Even some of the ancient Romans might have struggled with this analogy *because* they had been "freed"—they were "free men" in that they had enjoyed emancipation from their social and economic slavery.
- I am sure this was not a very popular illustration when about half of his readers had been slaves or were slaves.
  - Think about it!
  - Paul says, "You been set free ... to be slaves!"
- Yet, Paul uses this metaphor to help us understand our responsibility.

The responsibility itself is given near the end of verse 19. Paul says, "So now present your members as slaves." Two weeks ago, we explored what Paul means with this command. We are to offer up to God our feet, hands, eyes, tongues, ears, brains, etc. as God's weapons. This is an important responsibility that Paul emphasizes through repetition!

Formerly, we presented our bodies to impurity/uncleanness and to a vicious downward cycle of lawlessness (*like Romans 1*). Our former slavery to sin produces more and more lawless behavior. But now, we must offer our bodies to God which leads to more and more holiness (*the process of sanctification*).

Carissa and I had the privilege on Thursday and Friday to drive to Morehead, KY and then Roanoke, VA to see our two sons play football.

- Our oldest son, Andrew, plays football in college and such a commitment demands much of him.
  - He gets up early and goes to bed late everyday so he can stretch and run and lift and hit.
  - His coaches often remind him that to play at this level affects every area of his life and if he does not work every day to be better, they will find someone else to play his position.
- Well, we had a conversation with Andrew over lunch and he 1) explained how hard that commitment is and 2) talked about several players who had quit in the last few weeks.
  - Andrew himself had struggled with motivation the last few weeks, that was until he got to play the night before.

- He got to wrestle with other 300-pound men in the trenches and it rekindled his love for the sport!

Now, maybe that can be an analogy for what we will see in scripture today.

- Perhaps, some of you feel like quitting on your commitments to God.
- It will be my prayer today that God uses our engagement in the Holy Scriptures to rekindle your fight against sin and your commitment to God.
- The main point of this passage is to demonstrate that we belong to God and Jesus and that means we are not free to sin but free to serve.

From Rom 6:15–7:6, Paul answers a second question about his theology of grace. That question is given in 6:15—“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” To answer this question, Paul speaks about being under grace in the end of Romans 6 and then turns his attention to the law in Romans 7. We will consider both today!

We made it mostly through the end of Romans 6 last week as we considered the new analogy that Paul uses to picture our relationship formerly to sin and now to God.

- Earlier, he had used the analogy of baptism.
- Now, it is slavery.

In 6:15–23, Paul explains that every person is enslaved to one of two masters—Sin or God. This was probably not a popular analogy even in Paul’s day, but Paul desires to show that we are under God’s authority—we belong to Him.

One of the two masters is tyrannical and abusive and afflicts with death; the other, however, leads to holiness and righteousness and eternal life through Jesus. One master is sin, the other is God or grace. In response to this, in verse 19, Paul calls us again to present our members—body parts—as slaves to God and righteousness. This is where we pick up things today. In 6:20–23, Paul presents two reasons why we must obey God and not sin.

#### ○ **Paul gives the reasons (20–23)**

The first reason is found in verses 20–21. ***Let’s read them.***

- **Because slavery to sin brings you shame and death (20–21).** <sup>20</sup> *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* <sup>21</sup> *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*

We must offer ourselves to God as slaves because slavery to sin brings us shame and death. That is, we cannot afford to go back to the way things used to be.

- The idea of shame is clearly presented in verse 21.

- With the word “now” (vūv) Paul considers the present demeanor of the Roman believers concerning how they used to live.
  - Now it produces shame!
  - Sometimes, believers recall their past life in sin in their personal testimonies in a way that almost glorifies how bad they used to be.
  - Instead, it is probably better to be ashamed of the ways that we used to live.
  - So, Paul says, “You cannot go back because all of that has just produced shame for you.”
- To this he adds the ultimate end of that former way of living.
    - The final outcome of that former way of living is death—total death, including physical death and spiritual, eternal death.
    - In other words, Paul considers here the ultimate end of sin that includes the ultimate expression of death—eternal destruction in the fires of hell.
- **Because slavery to God brings sanctification and eternal life (22–23).** <sup>22</sup> *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* <sup>23</sup> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

To this, Paul adds a positive reason for presenting our bodies to God in verses 22–23. **Let’s read them.**

The results of being enslaved to God are so much better. Slavery to God brings fruit and leads us to a desirable end.

- Because we are slaves to the greatest Master we can imagine, we get “sanctification” (*holiness; growth in holiness*) and “eternal life.”
- Think about what this blessed slavery brings ultimately.
- Ultimately, when we pass from this life to the next, we get to enjoy the very life of our Jesus in heaven.
- That is, because of our union with Jesus, we will get the new life that he experiences now in heaven.
- We will live with him forever and ever.

That is the free gift that God gives us! It is not wages.

- God does pay wages to us—things that we deserve.
  - He is not obligated or in debt to anyone!
  - Sin pays wages to those under its reign.
  - They get what they have earned. Sin pays out death, death, and more death.
  - God, however, gives a free gift.
  - God gives grace to those who are in Christ Jesus.
    - Are you in Christ Jesus?
    - Have you identified with him by believing in him alone for your salvation?
- If so, you will not be lawless.

- No, you will be sanctified—you will become holy—and you will live with God forever and ever!

So, brothers and sister, since you get these fruits and this end, serve God, not sin. There are good reasons to obey him and not sin. Being under grace does not mean that we are free to sin but enslaved to God.

**b) Being freed from the law means we belong to Jesus (7:1–6).**

After explaining why believers cannot sin because they are under grace, Paul turns his full attention to the law.

- He has mentioned the law of Moses in every chapter since Romans 3, but in this chapter, he will deal with it thoroughly.
- Now, when we think of Romans 7, we normally think of the great struggle Paul describes in the last verses (*I do not do what I want to do!*).
- Yet this chapter is more fully about the Christians' relationship to the law.
  - And, in this original Roman context, this was a controversial issue!
  - We will see more of that in Romans 14 and 15 when believers are disputing about the Sabbath and food laws.
  - I imagine some of the Jewish Christians who returned to the church after being deported by Caesar for six years would wonder why all the people left in the city who follow Jesus now do not seem to care much about the law anymore!
  - Well, is that true?
  - Is that right?

So, in Rom 7:1–6 Paul explains how believers are not under the law and what that means for them regarding sin. The argument of the passage comes in four parts. Paul starts by laying out a principle in verse 1, giving an analogy built off that principle in verses 2–3, making an application in verse 4, and then giving an explanation in verses 5 and 6.

- **Principle (1)** – <sup>1</sup> *Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?*

Paul begins by establishing a general rule about how the law impacts people in verse 1. **Let's read the principle that Paul gives in verse 1.**

Paul states the principle in the form of a leading question. He asks whether the Romans know that the law binds a person for as long as he lives. That is, the law's authority extends over a person for long, but only so long as he lives. Consequently, when someone dies, they are free from the binding authority of the law of Moses.

- **Analogy (2–3)** – <sup>2</sup> *For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.* <sup>3</sup> *Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.*

To that principle, Paul adds an analogy regarding the law and marriage. **Let's read verses 2 and 3.**

Women had no rights for divorce within ancient Judaism. Paul's analogy follows that line of thinking. He explains that the "law of her husband" prevents her from marrying another while her first husband lives. As a matter of fact, she will be identified as an adulteress if she marries another while her husband lives.

Now, the point in this text is not to give a full theology of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Other important texts factor into a complete theology of these things. What is found in this text, however, is consistent with other Biblical texts.

The main point of the analogy in this passage is that death changes one's relationship to the law and allows one to be married to another.

- **Application (4)** – <sup>4</sup> *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*

That is when Paul applies this analogy to believers and the entire law of Moses in verse 4. ***Let's look there for the application.***

Now, Paul's application does not directly correspond point for point. It is not directly parallel so that we are left wondering who the husband is who dies and who the woman is who remarries.

- His point, however, is to emphasize something spectacular about Jesus.
- Paul does it this way because he wants to identify our union with Jesus and what his death accomplishes for us.
- His application states that believers have died to the law.
- How we died to the law is "through the body of Christ."
- In other words, there is a death which releases us from the law's authority.
- That death is Jesus's death.

We must be careful to guard against people and theology that wants to pressure us to obey the regulations of Moses's law.

- This is still a common tactic of false teachers who would bind our consciences with regulations from the law.
- People do this when giving advice about parenting or diet, for instance, and suggest that Moses's law should guide us when we do these things.
- But, men and women, we are not under the law.
- We have died to it.
- We are under only one Lord—Jesus—and we should not allow others to pressure us to obey these mandates.
- Now, this does not mean that we are lawless, and it does not mean that the Law of Moses is a bad thing!
- If you are thinking that, then you are following Paul's line of thinking, because in the remainder of the chapter, Paul will defend the law. God's law found in Moses's law is still helpful—and we will learn more about that in the weeks ahead—but it does not bind us.

But Paul is not done with his application in verse 4. We live again, he says, to “belong to another.”

- This is the language of remarriage.
- We have died to the law but now live for the express purpose of being wed to Jesus and, that, for another purpose.

We now belong to Jesus in order that we may bear fruit for God.

- **Explanation (5–6)** – <sup>5</sup> *For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.* <sup>6</sup> *But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

Now, what Paul intends by bearing fruit for God is further explained in verses 5 and 6.

***Let’s look at those verses to see how Paul explains why we are free from the law in Jesus.***

Paul’s explanation moves from how we used to be in verse 5 to how we are now in verse 6. You can see this in the words “while” (*sometimes “when”*) at the beginning of verse 5 and “now” in verse 6.

When we were “living in the flesh”—our previous existence as an unbeliever—our sinful passions were working death in us!

- The word “passions” is normally translated “sufferings” in Paul’s writings (*seven of nine occurrences*), implying in our passage that the “sinful passions” of our flesh also bring various forms of “suffering” to us.
- This might not be how we typically understand the passions that worked in our hearts when we were unbelievers.
- We saw those things as bringing joy and fulfillment.
- Paul, however, sees them producing sufferings on the way to death.
  - Could the law deliver OT saints?
    - No.
    - Actually, it stirred up the sinful passions within them more and more, so they produced fruit for death.
  - So, what is Paul’s answer?
    - Well, that is what verse 6 is about!

Now, however, Paul says that we have been released from the law. He has already explained this by saying that we are “not under the law.” We, indeed, have been freed from the law but it is not so that we can sin. No. Instead, we are freed so *that* “we serve in the newness of the Spirit.”

- The relationship between these two words probably indicates either “source” or “apposition” (*the newness that comes from the Holy Spirit*” or “*the newness that is the Holy Spirit*”).

- In other words, we are not freed from the law so that we sin.
  - We are freed from the law so that we serve through the Holy Spirit.
  - You see, being free from the law does not produce lawless people when those people are united to Jesus and empowered by God's Spirit!
  - God set us apart from the law by the death of his Son, Jesus, and gave us his Spirit so we might serve in a new way and produce fruit for God.
- This the only way to bear acceptable fruit for God.
    - The only way is through 1) being united with Jesus in faith in his death and resurrection and through 2) walking or striving with the Holy Spirit who has been given to believers in Jesus.
  - If you are here today and have not believed in Jesus alone for your salvation, you will never be able to please God.
    - You will remain a servant of Sin.
    - Will you trust in him today so that He can help you serve him in the new way of the Spirit?

Having mentioned the "Spirit" here, Paul waits to focus on the Spirit until chapter 8 so that he can say more about the law in the rest of Romans 7. That way of drawing focus back to the law is found in the last part of verse 6. We do not serve "in the old way of the written code."

- The old way involves the law of Moses, the letters of the Mosaic law code.
- The written law of Moses is replaced by the living Spirit of God.

Being free from the law does not mean we can sin; instead, it means we belong to Jesus to serve in the new way of the Spirit. May God rekindle your desire to say "no" to sin and serve God in the new way of the Spirit of God.

**c. Answering Objections: Instead of sin using the law to bring death to me, God delivers me from death through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:7–25).**

When we start into the middle of Romans 7, we come to a text where Paul challenges Gentile believers not to think that God's law is bad. Paul knew that sometimes when people fail to obey God's rules, they blame God for unreasonable expectations.

As a civilization, we are good at shifting blame to others.

- We blame tobacco companies for giving us cancer.
- We blame fast food companies for making us fat.
- We blame our brother or sister for turning us in!
- We blame SUV's for killing bystanders in parades.
- We blame guns for taking lives.
- We blame police officers for setting up speed traps (*ur, I mean enforcing the posted speed limit*)

You see, we are good at blaming others and sometimes we do not stop with blaming objects or other people. Sometimes, we go right to the top and we blame God for the difficulties or challenges

that we are facing! Sometimes, people blame God for expecting us to be perfect and obey all his rules!

In our sermon this morning, we are going to consider what Paul says about the law and our sin nature. We must not blame God or his rules; instead, we must better understand our own inner corruption.

Let's take a moment and read the biblical text this morning. We will read the rest of Romans 7. Dealing with the text will take us at least two sermons. **Read Rom 7:7–25.**

Now, many preachers throw up their hands when they come to the middle of Romans 7 and refuse to go through the phrases and details of the text. Instead, they spend most of their sermons talking about who the “I” of Romans 7 is. While those sermons can be helpful, we are going to work through the text in hopes that the Spirit will work it into us!

Paul continues to answer objections in this part of Romans. He has already been doing this.

- It all started in Romans 6 when Paul began asking the question—“What then?”
  - He asks this question in Rom 6:1, again in 6:15, and now again in 7:7.
- To these questions, Paul always attaches another question to provide clarification.
  - He did that in 6:1b, 6:15b, and now again in 7:7b. Further, he always answers these questions with the short but powerful—“may it never be” (6:1c, 14c, and again in 7:7c).
- So, Paul is starting a new section in 7:7 that he keeps open until the end of the chapter.
- Now, let me show you one thing about these last few verses of chapter 7.
  - In 7:7, Paul asks a question and answers with “may it never be.”
  - He does this again in 7:13.
  - So, Paul has two questions about the law that he will answer in Romans 7.

We will take this week to consider the question and answer in verses 7–12 and then consider verses 13–25 the next time we come together.

### 1) Is the law sin (7:7–12)?

To answer objections regarding the law, Paul starts simply. His arguments unfold quickly and are arranged around four kinds of speech.

#### a) The questions (7a-b) – <sup>7</sup>What then shall we say? That the law is sin?

He starts with the questions themselves at the beginning of verse 7. **Let's look at them.**

Paul has said some really negative things about the law so far in Romans.

- 3:20 – No one will be justified by the works of the law
- 3:28 – One is justified by faith apart from the works of the law
- 4:13 – For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law

- 4:15 – *For the law brings wrath*
- 5:20 – *Now the law came in to increase the trespass*
- 6:14 – *You are not under law, but under grace*
- 7:4 – *Likewise, my brothers, you have also died to the law*
- 7:5 – *Our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death*
- 7:6 – *We are released from the law*

Yet, the rest of scripture might not be so negative. Let's consider three well known Psalms, for instance.

***Do you remember what the psalmist said in Psalm 1?***

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (vv. 1–2).*

***Or how about Psalm 19?***

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired as they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of a honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward (vv. 7–13).*

***Or Psalm 119?***

*Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation day and night. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies ... your testimonies are my meditation (v. 97).*

So, we can hear Paul's accuser: "You have made the law out to be sin! Wait just a second, Paul. That is God's law that you are messing with!"

So, Paul briefly answers whether the problem was with the law of God given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

**b) The answer (7c) – *By no means!***

His familiar answer is abrupt—"no way, by no means." God's law is not equivalent to sin.

**c) The corrections (7d–11)**

Now, to this answer, Paul takes things further by presenting two corrections to the question in a sustained argument. That is what is between Paul's negative and positive defense of the law in vv. 7c and 12—a sustained argument that corrects those who would take him to mean that the law is sin. The law is not sin; instead, two other things are true about the law.

- **Instead, the law helped me to understand sin (7d–8).** *Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had*

*not said, “You shall not covet.”<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law sin lies dead.*

First, the law is not sin; instead, Paul says, “It helped me *understand* sin.” **Look with me at the end of verse 7 and verse 8.**

The law is not sin, but it helped Paul understand more about sin. Paul does not say that he would not have sinned if he did not have the law, but that he would not have known or understood sin. Paul actually uses two words for knowledge in this text to make it clear that it was the law that helped him understand the true nature of sin. Paul came to know sin in the sense that sin *became clearer* and *more alluring* to him.

Now, some might just object here and say, “Why would I want to know sin?” “How is that a good thing?” “If when the law came in, trespasses only increased, how is the law good?”

- Well, for one, that is the only way this argument works!
- Paul says that the law is not sin, but, on the contrary, that it helps us know sin.
- Well, that is only a contradiction, if it is not a good thing to know your sin.
- But how is that good?
- Why would we want to know our sin?

Well, let’s suppose that two things are true about you physically—a bad thing and a good thing.

- **First, you have a terminal disease.**
  - If left unchecked this disease will certainly kill you.
- **Second, however, there is one cure!**
  - There is one cure that works every single time.
  - To be cured, however, there is one trick!
  - You need to know that you have the disease!
  - In such a case, we would all say that it is a good thing for you to learn that you have the disease.
  - It is a good thing to get the scan to see that you have the terminal disease.
    - Some might love to live in blessed ignorance!
    - You *can* do that, but it will kill you!

Now, Paul is talking about something far more serious than your physical health. He is talking about your spiritual and eternal condition. The law was good for Paul because it showed him his own sin, which, of course, would reveal his need for a righteousness that was not his own!

But how? How does the law help me know my sin?

- Well, the law comes in to show us all about our inherent sinful desires.

- You see, Paul says that he did not really know all about his sin problems until the law came in as an external authority to say, “You know, you really should not desire your neighbor’s house like that. You really should not foster and meditate on those longings for your neighbor’s wife like that. Stop it! God does not approve of those desires.”
- And, for Paul, that was something he had not known before!
  - “What, I cannot even think or dwell on those things internally?”

To state his point more explicitly, Paul appeals to one of the Ten Commandments. When Paul became aware of the tenth commandment—“Thou shalt not covet”—it stirred intense desires within him. At this point, I think it is good for us to stop and answer two questions about this.

- **First, we answer, “What is covetousness?”**

Well, let’s go back to Paul’s source. The tenth commandment is found in Exod 20;17. It says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” In its original setting, it involved desiring for yourself what belonged to your neighbor. It starts with his wife, and this suggests what we might refer to as lust. But the strong desire or passion extends to any of his possessions, his house, and his animals. So, covetousness is the strong desire, passion, or lust for what someone else has.

- **Second, we consider, “Why did Paul use this sin as an example?”**

But then we might consider why Paul used *this* commandment as his only example. Well, answering that question may be impossible, but it seems likely that he does so because this commandment forbids sins of the inner being—the heart. In another place, Paul describes how others would perceive his righteousness before his conversion. When considering all *external* marks of righteousness, others might consider him to be blameless. But this commandment revealed something to Paul himself. It revealed the sins that were under the surface in his heart.

Regardless, Paul came to know sin more and personally when he was made aware of the command not to covet.

And then sin—seizing the opportunity—produced in Paul “all kinds of covetousness” when he was made aware of this command. At this point, it is my belief that Paul describes his own sin nature (*depravity, fallenness*) when he talks about sin. When he was told he could not desire what others had, his indwelling sin nature produced illicit desires of all shapes and sizes, flooding his mind and polluting his heart!

You see, there was something deeper, a layer deeper, than his covetousness. Below that, his sin nature was seizing (taking) the opportunity to pervert the restrictions of the law and produce all kinds of lawlessness.

The problem was not the law. The law helped him understand sin. The real problem was his sin nature.

Now, the way Paul responded to God's law is not unique to him.

- When some people are made aware of rules, their impulse is to rebel externally.
  - Sadly, we have much evidence of this in our culture.
  - They say, "These rules are meant to be broken, and that is just what I am going to do."
- When others are made aware of rules, they do not rebel externally.
  - Their corruption is more internal.
  - When they hear God's rules, they struggle with anger or internal defiance or arrogance or covetousness or lust.
- **Instead, sin deceived me and used the law to kill me (9–11).** <sup>9</sup> *I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.* <sup>10</sup> *The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.* <sup>11</sup> *For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.*

But Paul has one more corrective to offer. In verses 9–11, Paul says that the law is not sin; instead, sin deceived him and used the law to kill him. **Let's look there.**

Paul's sin nature not only produced all kinds of lusts and covetousness in his heart, it also deceived him. That is, he was beguiled or seduced into thinking that everything was still fine. Again, perhaps, this was so because of the internal nature of the sins that he was fighting.

But sin did not stop there, it also killed Paul. That is, sin led him further and further into his own spiritual death with no hope in his own righteousness.

Again, the main point that Paul is making is that our problem is not the law, it is sin. Sin coopts or hijacks the law and kills us. Sin, like a venomous parasite, leaches on to the law so that it unexpectedly kills us with its poison.

- d) The conclusion (12) –** <sup>12</sup> *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

Now, Paul makes that even clearer in his conclusion. **Look at verse 12.**

In case the reader is still not clear, the law is not sin. The law is holy, the commandment holy, righteous, and good. Not only is the command not to covet holy, righteous, and good, so too is each individual command of the law. The law comes from God and thus is perfect in every way to accomplish all God's purposes.

## **2) Did the law bring death to me (7:13–25)?**

Today, we come to one of the most famous and important passages in all of Romans! You have perhaps heard some of these verses before. Within this passage, Paul says things like: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" and "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Now, I said that this passage is not only familiar, it is important!

- As a pastor, one of my biggest burdens *and* responsibilities is to help you find your way through the Christian experience!
  - There are so many voices in Christianity that tell you what you should expect as a believer and how you can achieve victory in the Christian life.
  - Yet, the voices many times contradict each other and discourage or even worse ruin their hearers.
  - J.I. Packer tells the story of being on the brink of suicide (*after his conversion*) because of how some people talked about this passage!
- I do not want you to be discouraged!
  - I do not want you to be confused!
  - I do not want you to be shipwrecked!
- But I do want you to get a realistic picture of what to expect.
  - I want you to see what the Bible says!
  - I want teens to see how things really are and not how things appear to be in believers who hide their struggles.
  - I want believers who are depressed in the middle of a war against their own flesh to understand some things.
  - And I cannot think of a better passage to show you these things than Rom 7:13–25!
    - Pay attention!
    - Oh, please, pay attention!
    - And, it is my earnest prayer, that you will hear the voice of God on how things really are!
      - There will be no “frills” to the sermon today!
      - No stunning or unbelievable illustrations!
      - Not even a PowerPoint!
      - But there will be God’s voice to you found in His holy Scripture if you will but read and listen!

In the second half of Romans 7, Paul answers potential misunderstandings of the negative ways that he has spoken about the law.

- He said, for instance, “We are released from the law ... so that we might serve in the new way of the Spirit” (7:6).
  - His opponents respond, “Are you saying that the law is sin?” (7:7).
    - Paul answers, “No way. The law is holy, righteous, and good” (7:7b; 12).
  - But his opponents are not quite done. They say, “Ok. Did that which is good bring death to me?” (7:13).
    - This leads Paul to give a stunning answer that vividly portrays the real culprit!

In Rom 7:13–25, Paul asks his opponents’ question (7:13a) so that he can answer it (7:13b) and explain his answers (7:13b–20) and then draws two conclusions on the matter (7:21–25). We will consider the first three parts this week and then the final one, Lord willing, next week.

Now, in an effort and prayer to understand this whole text, let’s read it all together.

**a) Question (13a) – <sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?**

So, his question is in verse 13: “Did the law bring death to me?”

Paul asks, “Is the law an instrument of death to me?” Paul’s critics misunderstand his gospel of grace and think that he is blaming the law for death. So, they ask, “Is the law to blame for my death?”

**b) Answer (13b) – *By no means!***

That question brings one more emphatic no from Paul. In the middle of verse 13, he says it again: “By no means!”

That question brings one more emphatic “no” from Paul. In the middle of verse 13, he says it again: “By no means!”

- The law did not bring death to me.
- The law is not what brought death to me.

**c) Explanation (13c–20)**

Now, to explain his emphatic answer, Paul gives us verses 13c through 20. Paul has a lot more to say about how the law and death relate to each other and what our real problem is.

- **Initial explanation (13c) –** *It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

His initial explanation in the rest of verse 13 is very important. **Let’s look carefully at that.**

The nature of Paul’s explanation starts with a conjunction not represented in the ESV. The CSB, however, translates it well. It says, “On the contrary, sin ...” Paul is offering a counter assertion. “The problem is not the law, on the contrary, it is sin.”

He points again to our root problem—sin. He has already explained this in the famous verse found in Romans 5—verse 12. Remember? “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men.” What brings death to us? Sin.

So, Paul says, “On the contrary, it is sin.” More specifically, Paul says, “Sin produces death in me through that which is good—the law.” That is, sin uses the law to produce death “in” me. Consequently, I believe Paul has two things on his mind here:

1) indwelling sin, which inhabits each of us and implants in us 2) indwelling death. Death is in me because sin is in me. The real problem is my internal sin.

The rest of verse 13 is very important. Sin uses the law to produce death in me for two purposes.

I want to show you some things about these purposes. First, we can see these two purposes when we see the words “might be” and “might become.” Notice the wording:

*In order that ...*

*(1) Sin might be ...  
and ...*

*(2) [Sin] might become ...*

These are parallel purposes. But I want to show you something else as well.

Second, I would suggest that these purposes are “God’s purposes.” These are not the whole or perhaps even ultimate purposes of God, but in verse 13, Paul considers *God’s* motivation in giving the law to his people. Let’s look closer.

- **First, God wanted the law to *reveal* sin.**

The specific wording is: “In order that sin might be shown to be sin.” The law served to show sin to be sin.

- With all the commandments found in the law—“thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, thou shalt not covet”—God wanted to make things clear to people.
- So, God says, “That sin *is* sin. Look in my law! See it there. You cannot do that or that or that. That ... is sin.” God wanted to use the law to *reveal* sin—to show sin to be sin.

- **Second, God wanted sin to become utterly sinful.**

But there is another divine purpose for the law. God also gave the law to his people in order that “sin might become sinful beyond measure.” Now, at first glance, this might seem all wrong. Why would God want sin to be “sinful beyond measure?” Well, let me explain.

I will start by saying that the sense of the Greek words here are quite difficult to capture. My favorite English translations of this are the NAS and NET. They say it is in order that sin might become “utterly sinful.”

So, in what sense did God want to use the law for sin to be utterly sinful? Well, God wanted to bring out the true character of sin, so he gives people the law. God wanted his people to see just how wicked sin is. It took something good—God’s holy law—and worked death in us.

- **Further explanation (14–20)**

Now, Paul further amplifies what he means with these initial explanations in the rest of the paragraph that extends down to verse 20. I summarize Paul's further explanation with two statements. You can see that he intends two amplifications by looking at the beginning of verses 14 and 17 (note "For we know" and "For I know").

- **We know the problem is not the law, but indwelling sin (14–17).** <sup>14</sup> *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.* <sup>15</sup> *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.* <sup>16</sup> *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.* <sup>17</sup> *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

Let's begin with his first amplification in verses 14 through 17. **Read it.**

To state Paul's point concisely, he says, "We know that the problem is not the law, but indwelling sin." He has made this point before, but he adds a few important nuances here.

- **First, to defend the law, he says we all know that it is "spiritual."**
  - Do you know that?
  - Well, now you do!
  - Now, what does Paul mean when he says the law is spiritual?
    - "He is saying that the law has a divine origin."<sup>170</sup>
    - It comes from God. It comes from the Holy Spirit.
    - This is an important clarification *because* earlier Paul had pitted the Spirit against the oldness of the letter or the "written code" of the law (7:6b).
    - In that text, however, Paul is not pitting the Spirit against the law but against observing the rules or commandments of the law.

So, Paul says, "We all know that the law *is* spiritual."

- **Second, although Paul is confused about his own behavior, he knows enough to say that he 1) *often* does want he does not want to do and 2) *sometimes* does not do what he wants to do.**
  - Now, this is where we run into big questions about how to properly interpret the text.
    - Every part of the little phrase, "I am of the flesh," is challenging for interpretation.
      - The first question is: Who is the 'I'?
      - Is Paul talking about himself or some other person?
      - Now, this is not trivial! Paul uses the words "I" "my" "mine" 40 times in this text!

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<sup>170</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 1–8*, 497.

- And there are at least five major ways that people have taken this over the last thousands of years with dozens of varieties among those interpretations.
  - Some people think Paul is actually talking about Adam (*or himself in solidarity [unity, harmony] with Adam*) in this text.<sup>171</sup>
  - Others suggest that Paul is actually talking about Israel or himself in solidarity with Israel when he says, “I.”<sup>172</sup> The problem with such views, however, is that Paul *never* mentions Israel or Adam explicitly in the text. It seems quite unlikely for Paul to expect the Roman believers to be able to break the code to see that when he says “I” he really means Adam or Israel.
  - There are three other ways to think of the “I” in this text. All these views see the text as *autobiographical*. Paul is opening up to tell us more about himself (*Imagine that! “I” means Paul! 😊*).
  - Some think Paul is describing himself as a believer.<sup>173</sup>
    - They claim that the normal way to understand Paul switching from past (*aorist*) verbs in verses 7–12 to present verbs in verses 13–25 would be to understand him moving from describing his life as an unbeliever (vv. 7–12) to his life as a believer (vv. 13–25).
    - They say that Paul is confessing his “struggles with indwelling sin as a Christian who is not yet glorified.”<sup>174</sup>
    - They claim that Romans 7 must be read in combination with the fuller description of Romans 8 to get the complete picture of the Christian’s experience dealing with sin.
    - Finally, they point out that the answer to Paul’s exclamation in verse 24 can only be true of Christians: “Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ **our** Lord.”

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. James Dunn’s work on Romans.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Doug Moo’s work on Romans. Moo believes that Paul envisions himself as an unbelieving Pharisee in solidarity with other Jews living under the law. He writes, “Specifically, I think that Paul is looking back, from his Christian understanding, to the situation of himself, and other Jews like him, living under the law of Moses.” Moo, 447–48.

<sup>173</sup> The following believe that Paul describes a believer in this passage: Cranfield, Piper, Borgman, Naselli, Luther, and most of the Reformers.

<sup>174</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 91–92.

- Others, however, think that Paul is describing himself as an unbeliever.<sup>175</sup>
  - They claim that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in this internal struggle against sin in Romans 7.
  - They mention that the “I” is a prisoner of sin, unable to break free of its power.
  - They suggest that Paul switches at this point in his argument to present tense verbs to vividly portray the state that he existed in as an unbeliever.<sup>176</sup>
- Finally, others think that Paul is describing someone (*like himself*) **who tries to deal with his sin through the law.**<sup>177</sup> They believe that Paul is not answering whether he is thinking of believer or unbeliever in this passage but is dealing with either type of person who tries to deal with his sin through the law.
- Having presented the views, I believe that it makes most sense to see Paul as referring to himself as he wrote Romans (*as a believer*).
  - I would have to be thoroughly convinced to go a different direction!
  - Paul is describing the battles of a believer who deals with indwelling sin and death until the day that he is glorified.
  - It is important for me to see this as *normal* Christian experience, not some kind of immature stage that can advance to Romans 8.
- There was a time when I thought this way about Romans 7 and 8.
- There was a time that I believed in a higher life kind of theology and might exclaim that we need to leave Romans 7 to get to Romans 8.

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<sup>175</sup> Most of the church fathers (including Origen and Augustine’s early view) believed that Paul describes unbelievers in this passage. The following believe that Paul is referring to an unbeliever here: Lloyd-Jones, Eerdman, Stott, Francke, and Bengel.

<sup>176</sup> Schreiner describes how present tense does not necessarily impact timing. He writes, “Present tense verbs do not necessarily indicate ‘present’ time. Indeed, recent research questions whether the present tense has any significant relationship to time.... The most satisfactory answer is that the present tense stresses the condition or state of the person enslaved to sin (Seifrid 1992: 234).... The state of the person who is a slave to sin is communicated most effectively through present tense verbs.” Schreiner, *Romans*, 386–87.

<sup>177</sup> The following believe that Paul is describing those—whether believer or unbeliever—who try to deal with sin through the law: Blazosky, Schreiner, Longenecker, Yarbrough, Mitton, Wenham, Fung, Bruce, and Seifrid.

- Instead, Romans 7 is Paul's mature and fuller comprehension of his own walk as a *normal* believer.
- These are two contemporaneous realities.
- Some might object: Do you think Paul would describe the Christian life so negatively? Do you think Paul would say this about himself?
  - I say, "Have you read Paul in other places?"
  - Near the end of his life Paul says, "I am the chief of sinners."
  - He also says to believers, "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit ... these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Gal 5:17).
  - To add another apostle, Peter called for believers "to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Pet 2:11).
- The final part of the phrase is not much easier. Paul says that "the law is spiritual, but I am 'of the flesh.'"
- Now, the "flesh"—the *sarx*—is that part of me as a believer that is weak because of sin.
- The flesh speaks of my being subject to and under the influence of sin that dwells in me.
- Sin has invaded my experience and has made a home in me so that my flesh (my material being) remains weak and sinful.
- As a matter of fact, Paul continues by saying that he is "sold under sin."
- Paul continues in this age, fighting against sin, and hoping and longing for the day when God *will* deliver him from this body bound by indwelling sin and indwelling death (cf. Rom 7:24).

You say, "Well that is a bleak view of Christians!" I say, "Does *your* present experience prove otherwise?" "Do you have sin all figured out?" "No?"

I see these descriptions of believers who know the battle or war that they face in sanctification day-by-day. Now, better news is coming! Romans 8 is coming! Christians do not live in continual defeat! But we do not live in continual victory either!

- **I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh (18–20).** <sup>18</sup> *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have a desire to do what is right, but the ability to carry it out.* <sup>19</sup> *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* <sup>20</sup> *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

But Paul is not quite done! The next way Paul explains his answer is found in verses 18–20. **Let's look at those verses to learn more.**

Here Paul captures the war that wages within himself. He starts out with a stark statement: “I know that nothing good dwells in me.” Can you believe that? This is Paul! How could he say this? I mean, he has the Holy Spirit indwelling him and he has desires to please God within him. How could he say, “Nothing good dwells within me?” Well, you have to read closely. When Paul says within “me” he means “in my flesh.” This is a necessary qualification of “in me.” Paul knows that his sinful, material self has nothing good in it!

In the rest of the paragraph Paul explains why he thinks nothing good dwells in his flesh and reveals again that while he desires to do what is right, he fails to actually get it done.

I hope that you can see the tone of the Apostle Paul in this passage. In these transparent words, Paul lets us in on what he was actually like. And, in this one paragraph, we hear him lamenting his inner condition:

- Sin is producing death in me
- I am of flesh, sold under sin
- I do not understand what I keep doing
- I do not do what I want
- I keep doing what I hate
- Nothing good dwells in me, in my flesh
- I have desire but not ability
- I keep on doing evil

Man, that is bad! That sounds like sin in strong and in me. That sounds like it is planted death in me! And, men and women, perhaps, that something that we should admit to God in prayer today as we partake in the Table.

“God, sin is producing death in me. I am of sinful flesh. I keep doing what I do not want. Nothing good dwells in my flesh. I have desire but not ability.”

That is true of all of us! But might I look ahead and read two verses? Romans 8:3–4 says, “*God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*”

#### **d) Conclusions (21–25)**

Verses 21–25 gives us a final paragraph about what is going on within believers with a brief glimpse to the future.

We have been working through a challenging passage about the ongoing presence of sin in the believer’s life. Do you remember what we have already seen? We talked for a long-time last week about who the “I” of Romans 7 is to learn that Paul used it in reference to himself as he composed this letter. Paul is talking as himself—a mature believer—and he says some stark things. He says,

“The law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.”  
“I do not do what I want to do.”

“I do not understand my actions.”  
“I do the very thing that I hate.”  
“I know that nothing good dwells in me, in my flesh.”

Now, in this passage today, Paul will use the analogy of war to describe what is going on inside us. Paul wants us to know about the unceasing war that rages with us, so we will take our time thinking through and describing this internal war.

Now, one of the hardest parts of understanding this concluding paragraph is that Paul uses the word “law” seven times and in different ways. Paul is playing with the term. Notice all the laws that Paul talks about in this one paragraph.

- “A law” (21a)
- “The law of God” – two times (22a; 25b)
- “Another law” (23a)
- “The law of my mind” (23b)
- “The law of sin” – two times (23c; 25c)

So, a key to this paragraph is to decipher what Paul is referring to with all these laws! The paragraph goes from verses 21 through 25 and includes a rule, a solution, and a summary.

- **A rule (21–23).** <sup>21</sup> *So I find it to be a law when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.* <sup>22</sup> *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,* <sup>23</sup> *but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*

**Let’s look first at the rule that Paul has in mind in verses 21–23.** Now, Paul actually tells us a great deal about the way this rule or principle works within him.

- **The rule itself (21)**

He starts with the rule itself in verse 21. That is, he states the rule succinctly in this little verse—one sentence. When he wants to do right, evil is present—is right there.

- I prefer those translations instead of “evil is close at hand.”
- That makes us think that evil is near but outside.
- Paul’s point, however, is that it is within.
- So, Paul says, “evil is right there when I want to do right.”

The rule involves indwelling, ever-present, evil within.

- **The way the rule works (22–23)**

To this rule, Paul adds an explanation about how it works in verses 22–23. In these two verses, Paul explains the rule or principle by using the word “law” four times.

Things can get confusing, but there is a key that I can show you that will help. The word “law” is used here to speak of two things and Paul’s argument is parallel, like what you see in Proverbs.

A- The law of God **in my inner being** (22)

- B- In my members another law (23a)  
 A<sup>1</sup>- The law of my mind (23b)  
 B<sup>1</sup>- The law of sin ... in my members (23c)

So, in Paul's mind (*inner being*), he delights in or agrees with God's law (*the law given to Moses*). But, in his body, he sees another law—the law of sin.

- By God's leading, Paul is like a spiritual doctor that can perform an X-ray, so he sees the real spiritual problem.
- That problem is the internal law of sin. This speaks to the power that sin continues to exercise over us.
- Although it is true that sin will not rule over us—we will win the war with sin, Paul here speaks to the daily tactical defeats that we sometimes experience at the hands of sin.

This is the law or governing principle of sin that Paul still finds in his body. Indwelling sin proclaims its own law and believers sometimes submit to a ruler that they are no longer under!

Now, notice *how* this works.

- Paul says that the law of sin wages war against God's law that he loves in his mind.
  - This is actually a participle.
  - It means to be “at war with” (ἀντιστρατεύμενον).
  - The power that sin exerts within us is “at war against” the law of God that I love in my mind.
- But it is not only waging war against God's law, it is also taking me captive to itself (αἰχμαλωτίζοντά).
  - That is, although sin will not rule over us and is a defeated power, that does not stop it from trying to force its way on me, making me again its captive.

That is the rule—the life principle—that Paul finds within himself and that is how it works! Sin's law wages war in me and takes me captive.

- **A solution (24–25a).**

But Paul cannot help but inject some other thoughts about a solution that believers will find in the future. Paul interrupts the flow of thought by injecting emotional cries and shouts in verse 24 and the first part of verse 25. Here he moves from the rule of indwelling sin to its solution. **Let's read these verses.**

- **A cry for help (24)** – <sup>24</sup> *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Paul starts out by summarizing his wretched condition.

- The word “wretched” (ταλαίπωρος) means miserable or distressed.

- Paul starts the sentence with this word to grab the reader's attention.
- Now again, one might wonder how Paul would describe himself in this way, but one commentator helps us think through the way spiritual maturity actually works.
  - Cranfield writes, "The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are."<sup>178</sup>
- Although Paul was advancing in Christ-likeness, his perception of himself grew clearer and clearer.

When I hear someone talk about how good they are or how much they have changed so that they are not really like the sin that they previously committed, I cringe.

- They say, "Well, I cannot wait till you see how well I am doing! I am just not like that anymore. I hope people see me for who I am."
- I think, "Well, that is not how Paul saw himself."
- Paul says, "Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh." "I am the chief of sinners." "Wretched man that I *am*."

It is so bad in Paul's regular battles against sin and his flesh that he knows salvation will have to come from someone outside of himself. So, he asks, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" This is a cry for deliverance where Paul is amping up the drama. He knows his physical body is enslaved to death. It is a corruptible, decaying, sin-filled body.

Paul's question is about "this body of death" (ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου). Paul wants deliverance from our body that is subject to death. Now, Paul expands his thoughts here in another passage. **Consider 2 Cor 5:2-4.** It says,

*<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we groan in this body, desiring to put on our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup> since, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, we groan while we are in this tent, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life. (CSB)*

Not enough of us speak this way about deliverance from our body.

- We often say, "We are not quite ready to go to heaven." "We have some more that we want to experience."
- We do not speak this way about deliverance and, we rebuke believers who *might* articulate something like this!
  - Well, our problem might *be* that we do not speak this way because we do not think this way.

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<sup>178</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 366.

- Perhaps, it's *because* we have not really wrestled with the struggle that is happening in us every day.
- Instead, we amuse *and* distract and—worse yet—deceive ourselves, refusing to actually do the math and see how often and how depraved our sin struggles are.

Now, when Paul asks this question, he uses a *future* tense verb that is normally translated “will deliver,” and it is best to see Paul asking a question about his future deliverance.

○ **A shout of joy (25a) – <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord!**

That is when Paul's cry for help turns to a shout of joy! In verse 25, Paul confidently boasts in the future deliverance that God *will* affect for him and other believers through Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul speaks of the liberation that we will experience in the last days when Jesus returns and frees us from our sinful, physical bodies to serve in new sinless, glorified bodies.

There is not a single one of us here who can deliver himself or herself from this ongoing conflict.

- You do not have the power to eradicate the flesh.
- You do not have enough self-will to get rid of it.
- You cannot get the unwanted guest out.
  - I hear that getting squirrels out of a house infested with them is quite challenging!
  - Gladly, I have not had that experience!
  - But imagine that you were in a home with an attic and crawl spaces full of squirrels.
  - You try to carry on conversations and ignore it, but you keep seeing them, you keep hearing them, you cannot get rid of them.
    - They are always there!
  - That is the situation with your sinful flesh.
    - You cannot get it out!

The final, ultimate deliverance from indwelling sin has not yet happened, just as our final, ultimate deliverance from death has not yet happened. Do you remember Paul dealing with that in 1 Corinthians 15?

- Paul suggests that death will be defeated ultimately in the future.
- He says, “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory? O death, where is your victory? O death, where in your sting?” But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- In that chapter, Paul considers what will happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

- Death will be overcome and eradicated from us in that moment!

So, Paul's point about the indwelling sin nature in Romans 7 is the same! We will be delivered by Jesus.

Now, I want to keep us here on the mountain top for a while longer!

- Think about how great this will be—how great it will feel to have our indwelling sin nature completely eradicated!
- Imagine, the war is over—our enemy, sin, is destroyed!
- Can I get an Amen, this morning?
- Anyone else weary of the battle?

Another way of saying this is that in our justification, we have been made free from the penalty of sin. In our sanctification, we are being made free of the power of sin, and in our glorification, we will finally and completely be made free from sin's power and presence. Hallelujah!

Of course, the only way to respond to such a bright future is to offer us thanksgiving to God. How can we thank him enough for this future deliverance?

- **A summary (25b)** – *So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Now, after laying out the rule of sin's ever-present power within him *and* the solution that he awaits when Christ returns, Paul takes us back down to the valley of reality—the foxhole of reality and gives us a final summary of the points that he has made in the chapter. **Let's read the middle of verse 25.**

Paul has been proving his thesis about the struggle with sin and now restates it. With his mind, he serves God's law. With his flesh, however, he serves the law that "proceeds from sin and which sin propounds."<sup>179</sup> Paul knows that "pursing Christ is an ongoing, sometimes vexing... struggle" with the flesh.<sup>180</sup> But what is that? What is our flesh?

- Well, earlier Paul says that "nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh."
- So, the flesh is not my skin, it is me—my whole being.
- It is my material and immaterial parts.
- It is what I am "in Adam" as a fallen, sinful, human being.
- The flesh is the untransformed part of my whole being—of my fallen, sinful nature.
- The flesh is that part of my being that is harassing and pushing me to do illicit things.
- **Consider Gal 5:17–21.**

<sup>17</sup> *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do...* <sup>19</sup> *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality,*

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<sup>179</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 267.

<sup>180</sup> Yarbrough, *Romans*, 117.

*impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.*

So, Paul wants us to know all about the reality—the war within us. With the mind he might delight in and serve God’s law, but, in his flesh, he serves the law of sin. We might ask, in conclusion, “why?” “Why does Paul want us to know this?” Let me suggest a few possible motives.

- **1) It will make us long for Jesus!**
- **2) It will make us long to throw off this polluted, poisoned being and have it replaced with a glorified body completely eradicated from sin.**
- **3) It will strangely encourage us.** There is not something wrong with me! I keep feeling sin and fighting it, but others do not seem to have the battles! Nonsense. They struggle with things too, they just do not know it or they are not telling you about it.
- **4) Finally, it will help us help others.**
  - Some fathers, for instance, struggle to know how to talk with their sons about lust. Well, you can start this way—“Nothing good dwells in me, in my flesh.” You can say, “I serve the law of God in my mind, but I serve the law of sin in my flesh.”
  - When mothers know the daily war within their own souls, they can speak honestly to their daughters as well about the sins that so easily beset us.

When we all recognize the battle in our own hearts, it will 1) help us long for Jesus and 2) long for glorification and it will 3) help us stay in the battle and it will 4) help us help others. So, let’s not forget that we are in a battle until we see Jesus!

#### **4. It liberates through the power of the Spirit (8:1–30).**

Well, it has been a privilege to work through the middle portion of Romans with you in Romans 5–8. In this section, we are considering more about the nature of the gospel and what believers experience in their walk with God.

- We slowed down in Romans 7 to see more about the battle that rages inside us!
- Using his own example, Paul says, “No good thing dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”
- He then adds as a final summary that while he serves God’s law in his mind, with his flesh he serves the law of sin (*cf.* 7:25).

But that is not the whole story! In Romans 8, Paul turns his attention to “no condemnation” *and* “no separation” *and* the “glory” of the redeemed life. I like how Bob Yarbrough says it: “Chapter 8 is as fixed on the glory of the redeemed life—the life of the believer who has been purchased out of slavery to sin and made the servant of God’s righteousness—as chapters 6–7 were fixed on that life’s challenges.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Yarbrough, “Romans,” 119.

Chapters 6 and 7 described the realities in the valley or in the foxhole of the daily battles Christians face with indwelling sin. Chapter 8, however, describes the way God lifts us through His Spirit. So, Romans 8 will be far more enjoyable in its focus for us. Paul explores the lofty heights and the glory that believers have in the redeemed life.

- That is why Paul says so much about the attention and power of the whole godhead in this chapter. If we are going to talk about the glorious realities that believers possess, then we will talk about the Father, Son, and Spirit, and that is where Paul goes in this passage.
  - Words for the Father—"God," "Father," "Abba"—are used 18 times in Romans 8.
  - Words for the Son—"Jesus," "Christ," "Lord"—are also used 18 times.
  - And not to be undone, the word "Spirit" is used for the Holy Spirit 19 times.
    - These totals do not even include all the pronouns in the passage that refer to the persons of the godhead.
    - You know that Paul wants to focus on the glories that believers enjoy by his *constant* reference to Father, Son, and Spirit in the chapter.
- That is also why pastors and theologians have given so many lofty titles to this chapter. Listen to these descriptions. Romans 8 has been called ...
  - "the greatest chapter in the greatest book of the Bible."
  - "the inner sanctuary within the cathedral of the Christian faith."
  - "the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden."
  - "the highest peak in a range of mountains."
  - "If the Bible was a ring and the Book of Romans its precious stone, chapter 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel."<sup>182</sup>

So, in this chapter, we will consider the lofty heights and the glories of the redeemed life. More specifically, today, we will consider a passage where Paul declares that believers will not face any eternal judgment for sin, and, consequently, must respond with the right life that the law requires. My goal is for each of us to taste the grace of God in this passage so that we obey him this week!

Now, Romans 8 divides into three large sections. Paul starts with 1) "no condemnation" (vv. 1–17), moves to 2) reflect on future "glory" (vv. 18–30) and 3) finishes with "no separation" in verses 31–39.

#### **a. Believers now experience "no condemnation" (1–17).**

So, we will take a few weeks to consider more about believers being free from any condemnation because of their connection to Jesus. Paul starts by considering *how* Christ frees us from condemnation through the Spirit of God.

##### **1) How Christ frees us from condemnation through the Spirit (1–11).**

Let's begin with considering what believers experience in verse 1. ***Read it.***

- a) What believers experience—no condemnation (1).** <sup>1</sup> *There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>182</sup> This quote is attributed to Philipp Spener. See Godet, *Romans*, 295.

This is a significant statement. Just about every word deserves attention.

- Paul begins with the word “therefore” (ἄρα).
  - What Paul says in verse 1 is an inference or consequence of his arguments in Rom 5–8.
  - Paul begins, “So ... based on what I have been saying, the following is true.”
- To this, Paul adds the word “now” (νῦν).
  - The word “now” can be logical *or* temporal.
  - In light of the rest of this passage, however, Paul probably means: “Since Jesus died and was raised,” the following is true.
  - That is, things are different now *because of* what Jesus did on the cross.
- Next, we consider the powerful little word “no” (Οὐδὲν).
  - Now, this is an important word for Paul—so important that he puts it first in his sentence.
  - He does this for emphasis.
  - This is the strongest way that he could emphasize something!
  - It is like using bold and italics—“No.”
  - This word is sweeping and thorough in its renouncement!
  - This little word is very helpful for those of us who struggle with guilt and guilty feelings and consciences as Christians.
  - Paul says, “There is no condemnation—zero—none at all!”
- Paul adds that thorough renouncement to the word “condemnation” (κατάκριμα).
  - The meaning of “condemnation” might appear to be obvious, but Paul uses a rare word here.
  - It is only used three times in the NT and only in Romans.
  - The other two occurrences are in Rom 5:16 and 18, where we learn that “condemnation” is the opposite of justification and life—being made right eternally.
  - Being without condemnation means that we are free from God’s eternal judgment against sin.
  - So, Paul says that some people will experience entire and complete freedom from God’s eternal judgment on sin.
- ***But how? How is it possible for any person to be free from the eternal condemnation of sin?***
  - Well, the answer is found at the end of the verse.
  - Those “in Christ Jesus” (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) are free from all condemnation for sin.
  - The most important question to consider then is: Are you “in Christ Jesus” today?
    - You are not “in Christ Jesus” if you simply attend church or even become a member or could tell someone else things about Christ Jesus.
    - You are only “in Christ Jesus,” if you believe that he died on the cross for your sins, and was raised from the dead, and repent of your sin!

- Do you believe in Christ Jesus, and have you turned from your sin so that you are “in Christ Jesus?”

Men and women, this is what believers experience—no condemnation! None. I heard a preacher, Brian Borgman, say it this way: “All that was condemnable in us was condemned in him.” All of God’s judgment against sin—his holy wrath—was spilled out on Jesus on the cross so that “now, there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.”

- b) How believers experience it—through what God has done (2–4).** <sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* <sup>3</sup> *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* <sup>4</sup> *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

But then Paul explains how this is possible in Christ Jesus! *How is it possible that believers experience no condemnation in Christ Jesus? **Let’s read about it in verses 2–4.***

Now, when we come to these verses it is important to understand how they fit together. One clue is given to us in the first word of verse 2 and 3—“for” (γάρ). In both verses, Paul gives the grounds or basis for his previous statements.

- **Grounds for saying believers face no condemnation (v. 2)**

So, first, the grounds for Paul saying that there is entirely “no condemnation” to those in Christ Jesus is that God has freed believers from sin and death’s authority (v. 2). In other words, “God releases those who are in Christ Jesus from punishment.”<sup>183</sup>

More specifically, Paul says that this is made possible for those in Christ Jesus through the “law of the Spirit of life.” Paul explains that the restraint or authority of the Holy Spirit indwelling believers frees them from the binding authority or restraint of sin that leads to death. Paul can say that believers face no condemnation because God has freed them through His indwelling Spirit.

- **Grounds for saying believers are free from sin and death (vv. 3–4)**

But Paul continues in verses 3 and 4 with grounds for saying believers are free from the law of sin and death. Paul’s argument here unfolds in two stages.

- **God condemned sin (v. 3).**

First, Paul could say that believers are free from the authority of sin and death because God did it. God condemned sin in the flesh. That is what verse 3 is about.

Now, the way Paul says this is to say that the law could not do something. What, however, is it that the law could not do?

- Well, the law could not help us with sin.

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<sup>183</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 378.

- It could not help us with our sin problem.
- Or, as Paul says later, the law could not condemn sin.
- This means that the law *is* holy and spiritual and good—it is!
- But the law was impotent.
  - The law was powerless to help us against sin.
  - The law could *identify* sin, but it could *not bring victory* over it.

Now, why was the law powerless?

- Well, the law was weak in the flesh.
- The law could not do it because we could not obey its regulations and find its blessings. Although it offered blessing and life, we were sinners who could not obey.

So, although the law could not do this, “God.”

- It is literally and only “God.”
- The words “has done” are provided to make sense out of the intentionally broken grammar in the original.
- “What the law could not do, God!”

Now, how did God do it?

- Well, God did it “by sending His own Son.”
- Let’s stop for a moment.
- This phrase is important.
- We learn in it not only how God condemned sin in the flesh—in the incarnation of Jesus, we also learn something more about Jesus.
- When God sent baby Jesus into the world, He sent his pre-existent Son.
- That is, his Son was already in existence when God sent him.
- So, God sent the Son into the world.

But two phrases (*prepositions*) describe more about God sending his Son into the world so *that* we learn how and why God sent us His own son.

- **How?** First, God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας).

Now, this is a precise statement where every part matters. Paul says that Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

- This is Paul’s way of saying what Heb 4:15 says about Jesus.

*We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.*

- If Paul would have said that Jesus came “in sinful flesh,” interpreters might think that Jesus was a sinner or that he sinned.
- So, Paul says that Jesus came “in the likeness” of sinful flesh.

- This is the only way that Paul could say this to protect both the humanity and the sinlessness of Jesus.
- **Why?** Second, God sent His Son “for sin” (περὶ ἁμαρτίας).
  - Now, these two words are often used in the OT (the LXX) to describe the sin offering.<sup>184</sup>
  - Consequently, this could be translated “as a sin offering.”
  - So, the judgment that our sin deserved was poured out on our sin-bearer, Jesus.
  - This is why God sent His own Son and how Paul could say that we are “free” from the authority of sin that leads to death.

Wow! Think about the ramifications of everything Paul has been saying so far in verses 1–3. Believers will not be judged by God for their sins because God’s Son took all God’s wrath and judgment for our sin. Can you believe it—“no condemnation”? Now, that is grace.

Within our own constitutional rights in the United States is the clause of “double jeopardy.” It is part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. It reads, “No person shall ... be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb.” Now, this clause is intended to protect citizens from being tried over and over again for the same crime.

God functions in a similar way. Since Jesus bore the penalty for our crimes for us, believers in Jesus will never be tried or punished for their sin. We not only are free from facing the eternal judgment of God for our sins twice, we do not even face its condemnation once because Jesus took it for us.

But Paul is not yet done because he knows that we might presume on such grace!

○ **God condemned sin that we might fulfill the law’s righteous requirement (v. 4).**

So, in verse 4, we learn that God’s purposes in freeing us from sin and death and from the condemnation of our sin “relates directly to believers.”<sup>185</sup> ***Let’s read about it again in verse 4.***

God condemned sin through Jesus so *that* we might fulfill “the righteous requirement of the law.” Now, what do you suppose that means?

- Well, the “righteous requirement of the law” likely means the “right or just requirements” that the law required.
- That is, God sent Jesus to empower us in some way so that we might actually fulfill what the law required.

But there are two ways that scholars think this might work.

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<sup>184</sup> See Lev 7:37, Psa 40:6, and Heb 10:6, 8.

<sup>185</sup> Harvey, *Romans*, 191.

- I would normally think that the way we fulfill what the law requires is through Jesus's righteousness transferred to us.
  - That is, we are given perfect law observation through Jesus's righteousness being transferred to us.
  - That is how many scholars take the passage.<sup>186</sup>
- But when you look at the rest of the verse, it seems better that Paul is talking about the believer's *personal* obedience to the law's requirements.
  - That is, the law's right and just requirements are fulfilled in the ones who are enabled to "walk according to the Spirit and not their own flesh."<sup>187</sup>
  - God did it this way so that we might fulfill the right requirements which the law commanded through the Spirit!
  - Trying to fulfill the law without the Spirit's enablement is like trying to get a worm to fly.
    - We yell, "Fly." "Fly."
    - But what happens?
    - Nothing!
    - The worm cannot get it done!
  - But, with the Spirit, the Christian becomes a butterfly!
    - A change has happened so that now we are commanded, "Fly." "Fly."
    - And what happens?
    - Grace happens!
    - We fly! We begin to fulfill the law, loving God and one another *because* God has given us the Spirit of God.
    - We do not obey perfectly, but God sent His own Son to condemn sin for the purpose of empowering Spirit-filled believers to fly—to begin to produce the righteousness that the law required.
    - I close our reflections this morning with the famous words attributed to John Bunyan.

*"Run, John, Run," the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings, it bids us fly and gives us wings.*

**c) How believers experience no condemnation (part 2): through the indwelling of the Spirit (5–11).**

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<sup>186</sup> Doug Moo, for instance, believes that this refers to believer's experiencing Jesus's perfect conformity to the law.

<sup>187</sup> Thomas Schreiner and Charles Cranfield believe that this refers to the personal, individual obedience of believers who imperfectly obey the law.

In Romans 5–11, Paul continues to speak about how believers experience no condemnation. These verses contain two paragraphs, where Paul talks about how the Spirit helps believers *generally* before describing what he does in the Roman believers *personally*.

- We should think skeptically about someone who starts his sentence with: “Well, the way that I like to think about God is ....”
  - Unfortunately, we live in a time when hearing something like this is common!
  - We can imagine a town-hall meeting where everyone shares their ignorance on the subject!
- When we hear something like that we should think: “I do not really care about what you think about God! I want to hear what the Bible says about Him!”
- The same is true about the Christian life!
  - When someone begins, “When I think about the Christian life, I think ....”
  - Now, the proper response is grace!
  - But it is grace that remains firmly committed to what the Bible says about it—a firm commitment that will not let *mere conjecture* or *personal opinion* remain unless it is firmly rooted in the teaching of Scripture.

Well, the Bible has two profound points to make about the Christian life in verses 5–11—one about believers and the other about the Holy Spirit. The lesson about believers is found in verses 5–8 and the lesson about the Spirit is made in verses 9–11. Each lesson is established in one paragraph through three truths. If you add the three truths together, you get the fundamental lesson.

- **A fundamental characteristic of believers: Believers set their minds on the things of God’s Spirit’s because the Holy Spirit indwells them (5–8).**

So, let’s begin with three general lessons about believers in verses 5–8 before we draw the main point that Paul is making with them.

- **Those of the Spirit set their minds on the Spirit’s things (5).** <sup>5</sup> *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

First, we see that those of the Spirit are the ones who set their minds on the Spirit’s things. **Look with me at verse 5.**

Now, I want you to notice the language that Paul uses to describe people’s relationship to the flesh and the Spirit in verses 4 and 5:

Flesh	Spirit
“they walk ... according to the flesh” (4b) (περιπατοῦσιν ... κατὰ σάρκα)	“they walk ... according to the Spirit” (4b) (περιπατοῦσιν ... κατὰ πνεῦμα)
“they are according to the flesh” (5a) (ὄντες κατὰ σάρκα)	“they are according to the Spirit” (5a) (ὄντες κατὰ πνεῦμα)
“they set their minds on the things of the flesh” (5a) (φρονοῦσιν τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς)	“they set their minds on ... the things of the Spirit” (5a) (φρονοῦσιν ... τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος)

Let's consider a few things about how these phrases relate to each other in verses 4–5.

- First, verse 5a begins on the most basic level by describing two types of people—1) “those who are according to the flesh” and 2) “those who are according to the Spirit.”
  - This is who people are.
  - We are one or the other.
  - We are according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.
- Then we learn that who we are flows (v. 5a) naturally into how we walk (v. 4b).
  - It is those who are according to the Spirit who walk according to the Spirit.
  - In other words, those who walk according to the Spirit do so because they are of the Spirit.
  - In other words, behavior springs forth from our nature.
- Finally, we see one of the fundamental marks of those of the Spirit is that they set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
  - ***But what does that mean?*** More specifically, we have to dig deeper into two *specific* questions here.

- ***First, what does it mean to “set your mind” on something?***

The translation “set your mind on” (φρονεῖν) comes from one word in the original that is hard to translate. It speaks of the mind or of thinking. Paul repeatedly appeals to the value of fixing our minds on good things in Philippians. It is the theme of the whole book.

In this Romans passage, according to the old scholar John Murray, to set your mind on something means that something becomes “the absorbing object of our thought, interests, affections, and purpose.”<sup>188</sup> In other words, because of who we are, we set our focus on one of two things—the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit.

- That leads to our second question—What are the Spirit’s things? Well, that is a hard question! Might I just say, however, that the things of the Spirit are the things He desires.
  - He desires that you have fruit!
  - The fruit of love for God and neighbor.
  - The fruit of joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control!

That is what spiritual people set their minds on—the things of the Spirit!

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<sup>188</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 285.

- **Setting the mind on the Spirit brings life and peace (6).** <sup>6</sup> *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

But then we learn another lesson in verse 6. Setting the mind on the Spirit's things brings life and peace. **Let's read verse 6.**

In this verse, Paul offers further explanation about the importance of our mindset—our thinking. If our consistent way of thinking is on what the flesh wants, the produce or end is death. If, however, our consistent focus is what the Spirit desires because we are of the Spirit, then the end is life and peace.

Sin produces alienation, destruction, and misery.

Some of us could talk about the pain and misery that our sin has even produced this week!

- Spirit-filled living, however, brings life and peace from God.
- This does not mean that we will not face difficulties or always feel subjectively at peace, but the reality is that we are at peace with God if we are of the Spirit and set our focus on the things that please Him.

- **Setting the mind on the flesh is against God (7–8).** <sup>7</sup> *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* <sup>8</sup> *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Next, Paul considers what setting the mind on the flesh involves. **Read verses 7–8.**

When people set their minds on what the flesh wants, they are in opposition to God. Sometimes, we think that our sin is simple failure or minor infraction; instead, it is opposition to God.

That is when we learn a few more things about our flesh. We learn that it does not and cannot submit to God's law. The problem is not just rebellion or refusal, the problem is inability. Notice what Paul says the flesh cannot do. Two things:

- It cannot submit to God's laws.
- It cannot please God.

This speaks to moral inability! The person who sets his mind on the flesh is entirely against God, unable to please Him. He will *never* find the favor of God in his sinful flesh.

These three truths portray one fundamental characteristic of believers. Believers set their minds on the things of God's Spirit because the Holy Spirit of God indwells them.

It seems important then to ask:

- What sort of things do you like to think about?
- When you get a chance to think, what are your favorite meditations?

- Do you like to think about what God is doing and longs for in your life or do you like to foster thoughts about what your sinful nature—the flesh—longs for?
- Another way of asking this question is: Do you have the Holy Spirit in you?
  - I do not want any person here to leave without Him!
  - I am sure there are people here who do not know if God’s Spirit is them!
  - You can receive the Holy Spirit this very hour if you would pray: “God, I believe in Jesus who died on the cross for my sins. I now turn from my sin and put my trust in Jesus’s work on the cross for my sin.”
  - If you would pray something like that, God will put His Holy Spirit inside you!

Now, if we believe this! If we believe that the Spirit of God indwells us, then there are some amazing ramifications and that is where Paul turns next.

▪ **A fundamental quality of the indwelling Spirit (9–11)**

Now, Paul does not want the Romans to keep things general. He applies these truths directly to his readers personally in verses 9 through 11. When he says, “You, however.” He moves from “those who” to “you.”

The following things are true for us because of our union with Jesus. Paul makes three points to encourage the Romans believers here. We will consider those three truths before we see what it all means.

- **You are in the Spirit if the Spirit indwells you (9).** <sup>9</sup> *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

First, he says, “You are in the Spirit if the Spirit indwells you.” **Let’s read verse 9.**

Paul starts this passage by affirming that the Roman believers are in the Spirit and not the flesh. This reality, however, rests on one important condition. You are in the Spirit if the Spirit is in you.

Now, it does not appear that Paul is saying this to produce doubt in the Romans. He is reassuring believers. “He uses this word because he wants them to reflect on the matter and conclude, as he does, that the Spirit actually dwells in them.”<sup>189</sup>

A very important fundamental teaching of the Bible and of our church is that the Holy Spirit comes to make his home in every genuine believer of Christ.

- We believe in one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- All three members are repeatedly referred to in this passage.
- Here, however, Paul talks about the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer.

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<sup>189</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans*, 538.

If a person turns from sins and confesses that Jesus is Lord, God not only forgives him or her of sin, he also puts His Spirit inside of him or her. Simply put. If you do not have the Spirit, then you are not a believer.

- **The Spirit gives life (10).** <sup>10</sup> *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

But the lessons continue. **Let's look to verse 10 for the next one.**

Another way for Paul to talk about the indwelling Spirit is to say "Christ" is in us. He speaks this way in Colossians as well.

*I love this passage in Colossians (1:26–28)! The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

There is a sense in which to have the Holy Spirit indwelling us is to have Christ in us!

Now, in Rom 8:10, Paul's point is that if indeed the Spirit of God indwells you, then you have life.

- In my opinion, Paul speaks here of the new life that the Spirit brings believers.
- Before conversion, we were dead in trespasses and sin, but now, the Spirit of God makes us alive.

This is the present work of the Spirit of God who gives us spiritual life. Do you understand this?

- The Holy Spirit is like a resuscitating device! We were dead—completely and utterly unresponsive and unable—but then the Spirit of God came upon us—came within us—and shot life into us!
- Marvel at this for a moment, men and women!
  - Think about it!
  - The third person of the Holy Trinity takes up residence in you!
  - What do you think that means for you in your battles with sin?
  - Well, the ramifications are too many to count!

- **The Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies (11).** <sup>11</sup> *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

But there is more truth we must see. **Let's look at verse 11.**

Finally, Paul speaks of a future blessing that the Holy Spirit brings for believers.

- This refers to the future bodily resurrection of believers.
- Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection.
- Each Sunday we meet to celebrate that! Each Sunday is an Easter Sunday!

*Up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with his saints to reign! He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

- Now, in this passage, Paul explains one significant result of that resurrection.
- In the future, at the return of Jesus, all those in Him will also be made alive.
- Our death-plagued bodies will be quickened, and we will be glorified.
- The Spirit is a pledge of that and an agent through whom it will be accomplished!
- We will get new life in our mortal bodies.

These three truths—1) You are in the Spirit if he indwells you, 2) the Spirit gives life, and 3) the Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies in the future—make one unique contribution. Paul wants us to know that the Holy Spirit injects spiritual and physical life into dead unbelievers through union with Jesus. When the Spirit indwells believers, He injects life into them.

This should impact the way that we view professing believers all around us! This gives us hope and confidence that God is doing a work in lives.

- This gives me hope about my children.
  - Finally, grasping this several years ago, changed everything about the way that I parent.
  - I used to think that my children were always hiding things from me—that their fundamental desire was for their sinful flesh.
  - But, *if* they are “in the Spirit,” then the Bible has a different view of the Christian life.
  - So, I had to surrender—crucify—my pre-conceived ideas about teenagers!
  - If they genuinely know Christ, then God has shot life into them through His Spirit!
  - This does not mean that my children will not sin! They will! But the Spirit *is* changing and empowering them!
  - So, now, I appeal to them on these loftier grounds.
  - God’s Spirit is inside them and that means spiritual and someday resurrection life!
- This also gives us hope about our spouse.
  - If he or she genuinely is “in Christ” or “in the Spirit,” then the Spirit is in him or her, producing life—spiritual life now and future resurrection life when Jesus returns!
  - That might be hard for you to see! That might be hard for you to accept in light of all the ways that he or she has hurt you!
  - Are you, however, willing to believe this?
    - If God’s Spirit is in my husband, then there is spiritual life in him!
      - God is working—is pursuing, molding, disciplining, encouraging, strengthening, changing—him.
      - Are you willing to believe that about him?

- Are you willing to appeal to him on that basis?
- If God's Spirit is in my wife, then there is spiritual life in her!

Believers set their minds on the Spirit because the Holy Spirit of God indwells them, injecting life into them.

## 2) What are the implications of having the indwelling Holy Spirit (12-17)?

The last two weeks we have been considering an amazing pronouncement that God makes over us—"No Condemnation." Can you believe that? No Condemnation.

Imagine being called into a court room where the judge has complete omniscience.

- He not only knows about all things, he also has perfect knowledge of all your offences—everything that you have done, everything that you have craved, everything that you have thought, everything that you have covered.
- Then the charges are read—one-by-one—in front of the court, and the charges go on and on and on for hours and hours.
- There is no way to wiggle out from under this judge and He will in no way be corrupt or compromised.
- But then, an advocate for you stands up and says, 'I have something to proclaim.'
- "I have paid for each one of these crimes."
- The judge then looks over the case and says that he has no judgment or sentence to pronounce.
- It has all been paid for.
- You are not condemned!

We have considered that we have "no condemnation" these past two weeks because we are "free in Christ Jesus" (v. 2) and because we are "in the Spirit" (v. 9)—that is, the Spirit is in us. These two grounds for our justification involve love and grace but they also require obedience!

I love this passage for its extremes!

- It takes us to the mountain tops of spiritual blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ, but it also takes us to the mountain tops of personal response.
- Jesus said it so well in Luke 12:48: "To whom much has been given, much will be required."
- So, in this sermon today, we will revel in the blessings, but we will also hover over the requirements.
- Such things are exhilarating and serious, so let's pray that God's Spirit helps us get it.

This morning, we will continue our study, looking at implications of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. In Rom 8:12-17, Paul briefly uncovers two implications of having the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

- a) **We now have no obligation to obey the flesh (12-13).** <sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

First, because we have God's Spirit inside us, we now have no obligation to obey the flesh.  
**Let's read about this in verses 12 and 13.**

Now, we can understand the point of this text by making two observations.

- **First, notice our new obligation.**

In this passage, Paul uses a word that he loves to use in Romans. He says, "We are 'debtors' (ὀφειλέται)."

- Paul has already said that he experiences debt.
  - His obligation is to share the gospel with Greeks and Barbarians, with the wise and unwise.
  - So, as much as in him, Paul is ready to share the gospel because God has opened his own eyes.
- Near the end of the book, Paul uses this word again to describe the obligation that Gentile churches have to their Jewish brothers in Jerusalem. **Read Rom 15:27.**

*For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.*

But what is the nature of the obligation in Romans 8?

- Well, believers are debtors "not to the flesh."
  - We are no longer subject to the tyranny and master of our sinful flesh.
  - That is, we do not "need to cave in to the pressure to sin that the flesh places on [us]."<sup>190</sup>

Paul continues by explaining why we do not live according to the flesh.

- If we do that, then we will die.
- This is strongly worded and is a reminder of those who consistently live for their sinful flesh.
- The mention of dying, however, prepares the way for the next way he describes this obligation.

We must not only "not live according to the flesh," Paul says, "you must put to death the deeds of the body." Some old English translations use the word "mortify" here. But what does it mean to put deeds to death or to mortify them?

Well let's begin by saying that this is strong language!

- What we must do is something so radical and deliberate that only the word "death" can describe it.

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<sup>190</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 388.

- We cannot enter this half-heartedly or passively.
- Our flesh wants to use our body to sin and these passions are so strong that overcoming them takes utter determination.
  - Remember the words of Jesus—“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matt 5:29–30).
  - You say, “Well, that is radical!” “How could you say that?”
  - I say, “Well, I am not the source of that. It comes from the Son of God.”
  - You say, “But are you going to give some kind of disclaimer to that?”
  - “Well, no. I will let the Holy Spirit do that if He wants!”
  - Of course, cutting off limbs, will not even stop our lusts and sins if we do not follow Paul’s methods in Romans 8.

My main point here, however, is to show you, “This is not a game! It’s not play time. It’s war time.” Andy Naselli says that putting to death means to “root out and destroy.”<sup>191</sup>

- Like pulling weeds, we are responsible to destroy the sins and sinful desires that our flesh would force upon us.
- We cannot just cut the top off the weeds; we need to root them out!

The old puritan, William Garnell, vividly describes this process in a section of his 1,200-page commentary on Eph 6:10–20. He writes, “A Christian must prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins [*the sins he holds dear*].... ‘Soul, take they lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac—the sin which has caused you the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit. If ever you look to see my face with comfort, lay your hands upon it and offer it up. Pour out its blood before me. Run the sacrificial knife of mortification right into the heart of it. And do this freely and joyfully for it is not a pleasing sacrifice that that is offered with a countenance cast down. Truly this is a hard saying, and flesh and blood cannot bear it for our flesh will not die so patiently on the altar as Isaac did, or as a lamb that is brought to the slaughter is dumb. Our lust will rear and shriek yea it will shake our heads with its hideous outcries.’”

Well, that is our obligation. Put to death those desires and deeds of our body that are against God. This is our part of the daily struggle against sin.

Now, let’s be really clear here. Whose sin are you to kill?

- Your wife’s? Nope.
- Husband’s? Nope.
- Children’s? No.
- Boss’s? Wrong.

It is your own sin! You must get serious and root out and destroy your own sins!

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<sup>191</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 101.

- **Second, notice our new empowerment.**

But I also want you to see our new empowerment. In one little phrase, Paul captures **how** we do this. In the middle of verse 13, Paul says, “But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.”

- Here the word “Spirit” is instrumental and is brought forward in the original language in this passage for emphasis.
- So, Paul wants us to see that this kind of rooting out and destroying sinful deeds is only possible by or through the Holy Spirit of God.
- You see, because of our union with Jesus, the Holy Spirit is now determined to make us more like him.
- This is the key!
- Our obligation can only be fulfilled “by” the Spirit.
- If you try to kill sin any other way, you will fail—you will die.

This is not a moral, self-improvement program. No, you must have God’s Holy Spirit inside you if you are to be holy.

- Run to Him!
- Pray to Him for strength and victory!
- You ask, “Don’t you have something else? Some gimmick—some trick—some sure-fire counseling technique?” Let me push back on that! This is the Holy Spirit of God, that we are talking about—the third member of the Holy Trinity! He can help us root it out!
- Use the resources He gives you in the battle: 1) the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and 2) your *spiritual* brothers and sisters, speaking truth into your life, digging into your life, asking you the questions that you have given them the permission to ask.

So, this is the first implication of our new life in Jesus. The question is how are you doing with this obligation?

- Are you growing?
- Are you content with how things are in your walk?
- Are you “putting to death” the deeds of your body through the Spirit, through His Word, through his people?
- Are you serious and urgent and radical about this?

**b) We are now sons of God (14–17).**

But Paul is not done with implications of the Holy Spirit taking up residence in us. He has one more! The next is that we are now sons of God. This amazing passage is so encouraging. ***Let’s read the passage.***

Now, I want to work through these verses by drawing you to five attributes of our sonship.

- **The reality of our sonship (14–15a)** - <sup>14</sup> *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.* <sup>15</sup> *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.*

First, consider the reality of our sonship. Now, in this passage, Paul speaks about the leading of the Spirit.

- We all like to talk about how God leads us.
- In this passage, however, the Spirit's leading has nothing to do with guidance in decision-making or life direction.
- Instead, the leading of the Spirit is specifically what we have already been talking about.
- The leading of the Spirit is the Spirit's leading us away from doing what our sinful flesh wants.

The new idea introduced in verses 14 and 15, however, is that it is those the Spirit leads who are the sons of God.

- This new theme is intended to assure believers that they belong and are special to God.
- The actual language that he uses here is a bit challenging, involving a contrast between the spirit of slavery and the Spirit of adoption as sons.

Let's consider those descriptions.

- The spirit of slavery which causes fear is Paul's way of describing what we used to be as unbelievers.
  - I do not think that he has any spirit in mind here but is simply saying what the Spirit is not.
  - Before our conversion, we served sin *and* our flesh and did so in fear.
    - Living in fear is a status that describes a slave.
    - Slaves during this time were sometimes motivated by whips and hooks and crosses.
  - So, Paul says that 'the indwelling Spirit does not produce that—it does not cause us to live in slavish fear of sin or of God.
- Instead, we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons. It is at this point that we need to ask two things about the text to better comprehend what Paul means here.
  - First, who or what is the "Spirit of adoption"?
    - Well, the Spirit of adoption is none other than the Holy Spirit of God who indwells us.
    - He is called the Spirit of adoption because He is the one who brings to pass our adoption as sons and daughters of God.
    - The Holy Spirit produces our adoption as God's sons by uniting us with Christ and causing us to share his sonship.
  - But, secondly, what does Paul specifically mean by "adoption" in this passage?
    - Well, let me say that I will speak more about that next week as the word "adoption" is found in the next text as well.

- Let me just say now—about this text—that Paul understands the Spirit as the one who adopts us into the family of God to enjoy all the rights and privileges of being a child of God.
- In Roman cultures, adopted sons get all the rights.
- **The confidence of our sonship (15b) - *By whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”***

That is the reality of our sonship. That leads to what I call the confidence of our sonship.

***Look at the end of verse 15 to learn more of what I mean.***

We are so settled into our sonship through the indwelling Spirit of God that we are able to call God, “Abba, Father.” Now, this is an expression of warmth and closeness.

The expression actually contains two different words for Father.

- The first word comes from an Aramaic word and the other is Greek.
- Paul’s point with these words comes from something Jesus did in the Gospels.
- Jesus, and all Hebraic Jews during his time, spoke Aramaic.
- So, when Jesus would call God Father, he would use the word “Abba.”
- This is an affectionate and warm word that could be translated, “Father” or “Daddy.”

Now, the gospel writer Mark tells us in his gospel that when Jesus was at the depths of his greatest agonies in the Garden that he called out to God, “Abba, Father.”

- His concise prayer is worthy of close attention to every word.
- Mark 14:36 records it. It says, “And he said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”
- Jesus uses this title because of his personal, close, familial relationship with God.

Now, calling God “Abba, Father” is the opposite of fear. You use this term with God only if you enjoy a warm and confident relationship with Him.

Imagine the reaction from people if someone ran up to Joe Biden in a crowd and embraced him—hugging and clinging to him. How would people respond?

- Well, the secret service might take the person out!
- People would gossip and spread the videos and accounts if this person was not his wife.
- If, however, it was his grandchild, our whole perspective would change.
- We would all agree that a granddaughter or grandson has the right to a hug.

Tim Keller said, “The only person who dares wake up a king at 3am for a drink of water is a child.”

Although Jewish people, who would not even write out the name of God, might struggle with such intimacy, Jesus opened up a new way for his brothers to relate to God as Father.

- **The verification of our sonship (16) - <sup>16</sup> *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.***

We can be so confident in our relationship to God as sons that we can call him, “Abba, Father,” but then Paul tells us a little more about how we can be so confident in verse 16. I call this the verification of our sonship. **Look at verse 16.**

How dare anyone call God “Father”? What could warrant such casualness with God? Well, it’s because a dual witness verifies that we *are* God’s sons. The Spirit of God Himself joins with our own human spirit (*or the cry of our own inner being*) to bear witness to our sonship. As John Murray said, we have a witness given to us that joins with a witness by us.<sup>192</sup>

- **The fruit of our sonship (17a)** - <sup>17</sup> *And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.*

But sonship brings so much with it! Being joined with Jesus as sons of God means that we have an inheritance. This is what I call the fruit of our sonship. **Let’s look at the beginning of verse 17.**

If we are indeed children of God, that means that we stand to inherit immeasurable blessings. It could not be stated any better than the meditation of Simon Peter as he opens his first epistle: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded” (1 Pet 1:3b–5a).

Now, Paul tells us a little more about this inheritance in Romans too. He explains that 1) God is the source of our inheritance and 2) that it comes through our union with Jesus (*co-heirs with Jesus*). “Those united with Christ share in the inheritance that he has gained for them.”<sup>193</sup>

- **The condition of our sonship (17b)** - *Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

So, that is the nature of our sonship—the 1) reality, 2) confidence, 3) verification, and 4) fruit of it. At the end of verse 17, however, we learn one more thing—the condition of our sonship. The amazing heights of the spiritual blessing of being “sons of God” brings with it a condition. **Let’s look at the end of verse 17.**

As a means of encouraging the Roman believers to persevere in their commitments to Christ, Paul describes their need to “suffer with” Jesus in order to be “glorified with” him.

- If you are paying close attention, Paul is using a lot of “with” language in this final part of the paragraph.
- Our inheritance is “with” him, but so too is our “suffering” and “glory.”

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<sup>192</sup> Murray writes, “it is a witness given *to* us as distinct from the witness given *by* us.” Murray, *Romans*, 297.

<sup>193</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 428.

The condition that we must fulfill as true sons of God is that we bear suffering in this life like Jesus did. Now, this forms quite the paradox. Think about it.

- God has given us his powerful Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that created the entire universe and brought Jesus up from the dead—yet, in this life, we suffer in weakness in the footsteps of the Son of God.<sup>194</sup>
  - To whom much is given, must is required.
  - Through the Spirit, this week, let's get serious! Let's kill the enemy—our sinful flesh—and let's count our present sufferings joy in light of future glory.

**b. Believers will experience future “glory” (18–30).**

In Romans 8, we have already noted that believers in Jesus now experience “no condemnation.” In the next paragraph (*two sermons!*), we will consider their future glory.

While many translations break up verses 18–30 into two paragraphs, there are good reasons to believe that they are actually one large paragraph. One such reason is that the paragraph is framed at its beginning and end by its main subject—“glory.”<sup>195</sup> **Look at vv. 18 and 30.**

So, in this paragraph, Paul calls us to consider the future glory that believers will experience. More specifically, Paul begins by making an initial proposal about our future glory (v. 18) before giving four different forms of support for it (vv. 19–30).

- This is a deep text.
- It is a profound text that stretches our minds and our capacities.
- There are things going on in this passage that will floor you!

Having said that, there is one singular point or purpose that Paul has with all these verses and proposals and supports. Everything that he writes in this passage is to encourage and strengthen us to endure the sufferings and difficulties of life. The sufferings and challenges will eventually give way to overwhelming, awesome glory.

**1) Proposal (18) – <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

Let's start with Paul's opening proposal about suffering and glory. **Look with me at verse 18.**

Paul's proposal involves two realities—“present sufferings” (τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ) and “future glory” (τὴν μέλλουσάν δόξαν). Let's briefly consider these two things before we see what Paul says about them.

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<sup>194</sup> Johnson writes, “We find here perhaps the deepest paradox of the Christian conviction: that the Spirit of power that gives new life to humans finds its most proper expression not in ecstatic speech or healings; but in weakness, sharing the suffering of the Messiah.” Johnson, *Romans*, 135.

<sup>195</sup> Doug Moo says, “Although ‘glory’ is mentioned only three times in vv. 18–30, it is the overarching theme of this passage. Occurring at both the beginning (v. 18 – ‘the glory that shall be revealed in us’) and at the end (v. 30 – ‘these he glorified’), this concept frames these verses, furnishing us with an important indicator of Paul's central concern.” Moo, *Romans*, 508.

- Sufferings – First, the “sufferings of this present time” include “famine, sickness, disease, earthquakes, floods, fires, and death.”<sup>196</sup> This word includes persecution that believers face, but also the negative effects of sin on the world and our bodies that produce sickness, cancers, arthritis, pain, death, watching our loved ones suffer, and relational strains and betrayals.
- Glory – John Stott says glory is the “unutterable splendor of God, eternal, immortal, and incorruptible.”<sup>197</sup>

But that is not all Paul says about these things in verse 18.

- He says the glory that we should consider is the glory that is to be revealed to us.
- Now, there are different ways of translating this idea, but I think the best way is to say the glories that are to be revealed in us.
- One scholar describes it this way: “The term translated ‘in’ here implies motion toward an object from the outside that then takes the motion ‘into’ the object.”<sup>198</sup>
- The revelation of God’s glory then is not merely going to be something we see, but something we experience “in” us.
- In other words, Paul is talking about the glory of God that we experience and that transforms us at our glorification.
  - It involves the healing of our physical bodies from all the symptoms of death and disease.
  - It also involves the complete and utter eradication of our sin natures.
    - Some of you, brothers and sisters, have seen your most beloved partner or child or parent suffer under physical affliction.
      - You have seen them struggle.
      - You have seen their limbs shrivel and shrink and fail.
      - You have seen their mental capacities slip away so they could not function at all.
    - But I assure you, brothers and sisters.
      - If your spouse or child or parent knew Jesus, those pains and struggles on their deathbed were birth pains.
      - Yes, he or she went through the valley of the shadow of death, but they awoke in the presence of Jesus and will emerge from the grave powerful and healthy and pure one day.
      - One day, you will see them again and you will be stunned by their strength and beauty!

But there is one more thing to say!

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<sup>196</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 103.

<sup>197</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 237.

<sup>198</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 401.

- Paul says that our present sufferings are not even worthy to be compared with this future glory.
- I like the image that Doug Moo uses to describe this.
  - He calls us to consider a scale with sufferings on the one balance and glory on the other.
  - He writes, “We must, Paul suggests, weigh suffering in the balance with the glory that is the final state of every believer; and so ‘weighty,’ so transcendently wonderful, is this glory that suffering flies in the air as if it had no weight at all.”<sup>199</sup>
  - Can you imagine that?
  - It is like placing a one-pound weight on one side and a skyscraper on the other!

Now, this verse flies in the face of a prosperity gospel, that is consumed with telling us that God will always reward believers in this life for their obedience.

- The reality is that we will all experience pain and suffering in this world.
- We will all experience these things.
- We will all experience funerals, for instance.
  - But what will maintain us through all the funerals and the grave?
  - That is right!
  - Future glory!
  - These are birth pains—something far better is coming!
- All the pain and suffering will fade into nothing when the radiant splendor of our great God “surrounds and transfigures us.”<sup>200</sup>

## 2) Support (19–30)

After Paul’s initial proposal about suffering and glory, he offers support for it. Now, his support is orderly and marked out by the three-fold use of the word “groan.”

- In verses 19–30, creation (vv. 19–22), believers (vv. 23–25), and the Spirit (vv. 26–30) groan.

This morning, we will consider the way that creation and believers groan. Next week, we will learn how God responds.

- a) **Creation longs for future glory (19–22)** – <sup>19</sup> For **the creation** waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For **the creation** was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that **the creation** itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that **the whole creation** has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

So, let’s begin by seeing what Paul says about the created order. **Look with me at verses 19–22.**

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<sup>199</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 511.

<sup>200</sup> Eerdmans, *Romans*, 90.

The first reason for Paul's conviction that future glory is far greater than present suffering is that the whole created order longs for this glory. Now, the way that Paul says this is to talk first about "the creation" near the beginning of every verse of this section (vv. 19, 20, 21, 22).

***But what is "the creation" that Paul talks about here?***

- Well, I remember reading C.E.B. Cranfield's discussion of eight possibilities: 1) mankind and angels (*Origen*), 2) all mankind (*Augustine*), 3) unbelieving mankind (*Schlatter*), 4) believers only (*most 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century interpreters*), 5) angels only (*Pelagius*), 6) sub-human nature with angels (*Theodore*), 7) sub-human nature and mankind (*Foerster, Barth*), and 8) sub-human nature (*Ambrosiaster, Cyrus Chrysostom, Calvin, Sandy, and Headlam, Lagrange, Gaugler*).<sup>201</sup>
  - Wow, that is a lot of views! Is there any way to eliminate some?
  - Well, it seems best to exclude Satan, demons, and unbelievers because none of them are longing for what this text talks about later.
  - It is also appropriate to eliminate angels because they were never subjected to vanity and corruption.
- Instead, "creation" is likely a reference to all animate (animals) and inanimate (material things) creation.
  - All animal life (*lions, zebras, donkeys, bears, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, etc.*) and all matter (*stars, oceans, mountains, rocks, stones, clouds, trees, grass, plants, etc.*) are personified here as those things groaning for something.
  - This is a C.S. Lewis sort of thing (*with trees groaning*)!
  - Remember the scriptures do say that if the disciples were to remain silent about Christ that the stones would cry out in praise of him.

Well, all animate and inanimate creation is looking for something, but what? That is the next question!

And that is what Paul answers in this passage. All creation is longing and groaning for the future revealing of the sons of God (v. 19). That is, they want the followers of Jesus to be revealed in all the future glory that will be theirs when Jesus returns, and they are glorified.

But there are three other important ways that Paul describes creation in this text.

- **Creation is entangled.**

First, I would say that creation is entangled.

- In verse 20, Paul says that creation was subjected to futility.
- That is, God subjected creation to "futility."
- This word means "emptiness" and "inability."
- It is likely that Paul draws this word from his own Bible—the OT.

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<sup>201</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 411–12.

- In the LXX, this word is found in the second verse of Ecclesiastes and is then found another 38 times in the book.
- In that OT book, the Preacher describes life as emptiness and futility without God.

Here Paul suggests that God subjected all animate and inanimate creation to emptiness and futility. Now, when did God do that?

- Well, this likely refer to the curse that God brought upon creation after Adam's sin.
  - Do you remember when God said, "Curse is the ground because of you" (Gen 3:17)?
  - Now, it is at this point that we learn that creation is suffering under a curse, unable to fulfill the purpose and goal of its creation.
  - This futility is creation's ineffectiveness to redound to God's glory unhindered.
- I am not a small engine guy, but I know some of you are.
  - So, I hesitate to give this illustration, but I think it might help us.
  - Imagine that your lawnmower is barely working.
  - It does not start or it starts but sputters and stops anytime it hits more than a few single blades of grass.
  - My father taught me as a boy that when small engines run like this, you need to check a few things: 1) gas, 2) spark, 3) compression, and 4) air.
- Now, if you have a problem with this advice, it is actually probably something wrong with my memory and not my father's advice.
  - I am confident that he is disappointed with my knowledge of small engines!
- Regardless, if the engine is not getting gas or has no spark, it will not start.
  - If the engine is not getting air, then it will sputter, fail, and never run how it should!

That is what is wrong with creation, it sputters and fails. It is under the curse. But then Paul says that this curse was brought on creation "not willingly" (οὐχ ἑκούσῃ).

- Thielman explains, "Paul pictures creation as an innocent bystander caught up in the consequences of Adam's rebellion."<sup>202</sup>

So, I describe creation as "entangled." The cords of the curse of original sin have wrapped themselves around all animals and trees and plants and planets so that they are bogged down and bound up.

- **Creation is eager and hopeful.**

But Paul also describes creation as eager and hopeful.

The words "eager longing" picture creation as craning its neck to see what is coming.

- This word is used only in one other place in the scriptures—Phil 1:20.

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<sup>202</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 402.

- It is a Pauline word not used in other secular or Christian sources outside of this. It speaks of waiting “with hopeful anxiety.”<sup>203</sup>

As a matter of fact, Paul makes this clear at the end of verse 20 when he speaks not of God’s hope or believers hope, but the hope of creation.

So, creation is entangled but hopeful, longing for the day when the future glory of God will be revealed in believers. Now, why would they want that?

- Well, that is what verse 21 is about.
- Creation has hope that it will also be set free from its own bondage to corruption when the sons of God are revealed.
  - Later, we learn that creation is experiencing the pains of childbirth.
  - They are suffering, but with anticipation of better days!
  - They are longing for enhanced abilities to burst forth in unhindered productivity and power for the glory of its creator.
- Do you feel the world is broken? It is.
  - The earth and the universe are broken.
  - They are *not able* to function the way God originally ordained.
  - And they eagerly look for it!

Now, do you think that creation will get that?

- Well, that is a complicated question, and it involves what you feel is the future of the created order and the new heavens and the new earth.
- I will not get into it, although I would love to!
- I will just say that creation does indeed enjoy a time in the future when it will again thrive and produce and redound to God’s glory during the millennial kingdom—a time when crops will produce like they did before sin (*the reaper follows right on the heels of the planter because the crop is so robust!*), and creation will stride and thrive like its original performance.

**b) Believers long for future glory (23–25) –**<sup>23</sup> *And not only the creation, we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*<sup>24</sup> *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*<sup>25</sup> *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Last week, we began looking at the middle section of Romans 8:18–30. This section does not get the attention of the beginning—“No condemnation”—or the end—“No separation”—but it is worthy of its own reflection!

- This section is organized around one important premise—verse 18—that Paul offers about present suffering and future glory.

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<sup>203</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 402.

- Paul thinks of the present and future existence of believers through comparison and declares that the two are not even worth comparing.
- Future glory is so much better—so much more significant—so much heavier—than all our afflictions combined.

Now, we really need verse 18! You probably do not realize how important this verse is to your week.

- Some here are called by God to endure physical trials for 30–40 years!
  - Man, do they need this text!
  - **QUOTE IT.**
- Others are in the midst of three to four months of physical trials that might do them in!
  - You cannot sleep because of the challenges and anxiety!
  - You have cried more in these past 3 months than you have in your life!
  - I can relate to lost sleep and weeping because of a trial!
  - So, some of you are in the midst of a great trial that seems unrelenting.
  - **QUOTE IT.**
- Some men or women here have endured a difficult marriage for 40 years.
  - I often get asked, “How can I do this?” “How can I be what God wants me to be with a spouse like him or her?”
    - Now, I have learned that I probably need to do more listening than speaking at times like these.
    - In my heart, I often think about this and it helps me, but it is hard to hear.
  - So, I first ask God in prayer that their focus turns to eternity—the eternal, never-ending glory—that comes after the groaning.
  - It is our regular disposition to focus on the now—the trial—the present moment, and only to glance at the eternal.
  - After much prayer for this, I sometimes remind them that 40 years is long by earthly standards, but it is not even the beginning act of glory!
  - **QUOTE IT.**

Now, after that opening premise—comparison—Paul continues from verses 19–30 with reasons why this is true. Paul argues that future glory is better on the basis of three arguments. Paul organizes his reasoning around the word “groaning(s).”

So, first, creation is entangled yet eager, and groaning.

- In vv. 19–22, Paul personifies creation—all animals and matter or objects—groan, awaiting the future freedom of God sins.
- They hope to share in this freedom.

They, however, are not the only ones groaning.

- Next, Paul gives another reason that future glory is so much greater than present suffering.
- You can know that future glory is better because all believers groan for it. ***Look with me in verses 23–25.***

In these verses, Paul talks about people who are groaning and waiting eagerly.

- He describes these people as “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”
- Let’s take a moment to make sure everyone understands this.
- When Paul talks this way, he is talking about himself and the original readers of this book—Roman believers in Jesus.
  - He says, “we ourselves” in verse 23.
  - He is talking about believers.
- We are even more confident about this because Paul further describes these people as “those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες).
  - If you plant seeds in your garden, the first cucumber or tomato is the firstfruits.
  - It is the firstfruits that foreshadows the arrival of other cucumbers and tomatoes that follow.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. That is, he was the first one to be raised from the dead. One day his believers will be raised as further fruit of his victory over sin and death. In Romans 8, however, the firstfruit is the Holy Spirit.

God puts the Holy Spirit—the third member of the trinity—inside all those who believe in Jesus as a foreshadowing of great things to come.

- So, in this passage, Paul is not talking about everyone.
- Only those who believe in Jesus alone for their salvation will receive future glory.
  - If you do not believe that Jesus Christ died and was raised for your sin—If you do not believe and repent of your sin—then you have no future, reliable hope.
  - You cannot achieve *this* future glory in any other way.
    - You cannot work for it!
    - You cannot be virtuous enough!
    - You cannot get baptized to be accepted.
  - This passage is not about every person—not even every person in the room.
    - It is about believers.
  - You must believe in Jesus to be a son or daughter of God who awaits future glory.
    - Do this now!
    - Pray now!
    - Tell God now that you believe in Jesus to be saved from your sin!

But what is the future glory that believers get?

- Well, the middle of verse 23 explains that we eagerly awaiting “the adoption of sons.”
  - But what does that mean?
  - Are we not already adopted?
  - Did Paul just say that?
    - Well, yes, we are.
    - But adoption, in scripture, has two important nuances.
      - It speaks of the day we were brought into God’s family—a day which believers have already experienced.
      - We were outside, vulnerable, helpless – but God adopted us.
      - But adoption also can speak of a future time when believers receive the full rights and privileges of their adoption.
        - The imagery of a prince or a ruler might help us here.
        - A son of the king is the king’s son from the moment of his birth or adoption.
        - But a son of the king does not enjoy all the benefits of his sonship until a later moment when he becomes the king—his coronation.
        - That is the future aspect of our adoption—a time in our future when we get all the rights and privileges.

Now, in our text, the future adoption is also described as “the redemption of our bodies” (τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν).

- We are awaiting a day when God’s glory is revealed in our own bodies!
- This is the future glorification of our bodies when we get heavenly, glorious bodies.

That is “the hope in which we were saved.”

- When we were converted, we were saved, but we also came to know that this is not all we get in this world!
- In the future, we will experience complete and utter deliverance in heaven.

So, as believers, we wait in hope “with patience” or “endurance.” That is, we persevere amid all the present challenges and difficulties of life.

Now, before we move along to the next verses, let’s stop and consider what the verses do for us.

- First, they remind us of the true nature of things. Our present experience involves yearnings—groanings for better things. We will not get all of God’s promises in this life, which means that we will always desire more—more of Him, more of His promises—more of the glory that He has promised us. The present era involves groaning.
- But secondly, these verses also answer the question whether it is worth it.
  - Is it worth it for Christians to endure all the afflictions, betrayals, persecutions, and sufferings along the journey of life—the way to glory?

- Paul's answer is "Yes!" Future glory is so amazing, so unimaginable in its splendor and effects, that it will make all this feel so light.

### c) **God helps in our present suffering (26–30)**

So, we can know that future glories outweigh present sufferings because creation and believers groan for it, but they are not the only ones groaning in this text. Paul uses the same word near the end of verse 26 to declare how the Holy Spirit works on behalf of believers today. In this passage, however, we learn of God's response—both Spirit *and* Father—to our present suffering.

- 1) The Holy Spirit helps us (26–27).** <sup>26</sup> *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.* <sup>27</sup> *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Let's read about the Spirit's role first. **Look with me at verses 26–27.**

We can know that present sufferings are not nearly as significant as future glory because God is actually helping us in our current afflictions. Now, his help is so important and delightful that we will take two times in Romans to consider it! So, let's start with the Spirit's help.

In verses 26–27, Paul acknowledges the weakness of believers. The specific weakness that he has in mind here is weakness in prayer. This is not a weakness in the way we pray as much as it is a weakness in content. Amid the challenges of life, we do not know what to pray.

In other texts, we can see that Jesus is our intercessor. That is, he sits in heaven and intercedes for those who believe in him. Here, we learn that the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us. We have two divine intercessors. The Spirit intercedes for us in prayer. That is, he walks alongside us in our prayers and prays in accordance with the will of God. Now, there are a few important things to learn about this here.

- **First, the Spirit's intercession is expressed as "groanings too deep for words."** The original could actually be translated unexpressed groans or groans inexpressible, and it is this second way to take it that is better. The Spirit expresses himself to God in our prayers in a way that human words cannot accomplish.
- **In this divine conversation then, we learn something else about God.** In verse 27, it says that God is the one "who searches hearts" (ὁ δὲ ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας). This idea, however, is not new. This is a significant OT theme. Consider a few OT texts:

*1 Sam 16:7 – But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

*Psa 44:21 – Would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.*

These two verses are but a small sample of the profound OT theology of Yahweh. He knows all things, including what is in the heart of every person. No one has to tell

Him. No one can fool Him! He searches every little corner of our hearts. As the author of Hebrews later says, “No creature is hidden from His sight. All are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” This is God’s all penetrating knowledge of every aspect of our being.

- Not only does God know us, he knows exactly what the Spirit is saying in his intercessions because the Spirit’s deep communications are in perfect accord with God’s will for us.
- So, as we close, might I encourage you with this.
- If you know Jesus, you not only have the Holy Spirit within you, He is groaning “perfect prayers” for you today.
- Has anyone ever told you they were praying for you only to tell you how they are praying and you think—“Well, that is not what I am actually facing or feeling?”
- They are praying in a way that does not fit what God is doing.
- But then, someone else tells you how they are praying and you are struck with the profound and insightful way that they are praying!
- Well, you have perfect prayers expressed to God everyday for you!
- You can endure these present afflictions. God will help you, and it will be so worth the eternal glory!

## 2) God secures us (28–30).

In Rom 8:18–30, Paul considers a premise—a proposal about present suffering and future glory. He lays it out in verse 18 and then he gives reasons why we need to live by this premise in the verses that follow. The premise is that present sufferings do not even compare with future glories.

As he closes out the reasons for living this way, Paul describes how the Holy Spirit helps us in our present sufferings, making perfect prayers to God for us—and then he turns to what God does.

- Notice who is the subject of all the actions in verses 29–30.
- It is God (*he ...*, *he also ...*, *he ...*, *he also ...*).
- We often come to this text and want to see what it means for us, but fundamentally, the greater concern of the text is to who to show us things about God.
- That is what, but why?

So, we will learn more about how God works on our behalf to motivate us to live for future glories now!

- That is why Paul gives us all this information.
- Paul wants us to love and live for God now!
- He wants us to love God more than our homes, more than TV, more than friends, more than family, more than career, more than our hobbies (*man cave, gardening, wood working, football*) more than anything!
- Men and women, it is a rare person who lives for eternity now! It is rare, but it is obedience!

Heading into my fifties in the next few years, I have just started to think seriously about **retirement**. Perhaps, you have been there! You start sacrificing and saving and paying

things off so that you can enjoy those years when you do not have to go to work everyday! One thing you learn whenever this hits your radar is the value of living for your future in the present. The earlier that you do this, the more that you will have in retirement. I have seen people do all sorts of creative and sacrificial things so that they get more later. Well, that illustration is about retirement and the fleeting value of money over a few, final years. But how about living for future, eternal, glory? Paul wants to flip us so that our calculations have little to do with retirement but more—so much more—to do with glory. His aim is for us to live for future glories now!

So, let's learn about what God is doing to secure us through comprehensive promise and purpose to motivate our own hearts to live for glory.

- **The comprehensive promise of God (28)** – <sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

We start with the amazing, comprehensive promise of God in verse 28. **Read it.**

- **The content of the promise (28b)**

Now, the first observation we make about this promise is its content. **What is the promise of God in this passage?** Well, the promise itself is found in the middle of verse 28—“all things work together for good” (πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν).

- **“All things” comes from a word that we will see throughout the rest of this passage.**
  - It is comprehensive, describing any event that occurs in the lives of believers, whether we would deem these things to be good or bad.
  - Notice, Paul does not say “all good things” will happen to us.
  - God is not as concerned with giving us good things, as He is in using “all things” for good in our lives.
  - No doubt this includes the “sufferings of this present time” (v. 18) found in Paul’s premise at the beginning of this passage.
  - So, God uses even these present, challenging things.
- Now, the text says that these things “work together.”
  - I need to lay out a few important things here.
    - First, this is a divine passive.
      - God is the actor in these verses.
      - God is working all things together.
    - Second, this verb speaks of causation, not observation.
      - God is not watching things occur, he is working them—using them.
      - He is actively working all things together.

- To use an analogy, God weaves together all the things that we face into a tapestry to produce something in us.
  - Or God is molding and shaping us into something.
  - We might not like how He is chipping away pieces to fashion us into this image, but we must know that God is working this!
- But what? Well, the text describes it as “the good.” God is working all things together for the “good.”
  - But what is the “good?” Well, if you keep reading, the good is “conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.” As a matter of fact, when I get a new Bible, I often come to this passage, circle the word “good” and draw an arrow down to the next verse where it says “to be conformed to the image of His son.” God is using all life’s events to conform us to the image of His son.
- So, what does that mean for me when I am involved in an accident and total my car?
  - What does that mean when I get cancer?
  - What does that mean when we lose someone we love? It is for the good!

But the promise from God in this passage is that nothing that we experience in this world is meaningless. Everything that comes is intended by God to assist us on our journey to Christlikeness and ultimately to the glory that we will experience in heaven.

- **The recipients of the promise (28a, c)**

Now, there is something about this promise that we have assumed so far in this passage that would be good for us to look at more closely. At the beginning and end of the verse, Paul reveals the “recipients” of this promise. ***Who can be confident in God’s working all things together for their good?***

- Well, the text says, first, that it is “those who love God.”
- This promise is for those who love God.
    - It is not for everyone.
    - So, do you love Him?
  - Now, Paul does not normally use the word love this way.
  - Normally, it is God’s love for us and not our love for him that is Paul’s subject.
  - Paul does not normally give us credit for anything.
  - That is because we were dead in our sins, completely dead and unable to help ourselves.
  - Thus, no one of us could love God.
  - Well, consistent with his pessimism about mankind, Paul clarifies who these people are in the last phrase of verse 28.

- It is “those who are called according to God’s purpose” (τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν).
  - Some people show genuine love to God *because* they are the ones whom God has called according to his purpose.
  - God has a grand plan or scheme that He works out in life, and in accordance with it, He calls out people to love Him.
  - Now, we will consider more about this calling in the next section (*because the word ‘called’ is used again!*), but for now, know that this promise only relates to these people.
  - This two-fold description of one people is perfect.
  - The first one rests on me—“those who love God”—yet that could produce pride.
  - So, Paul adds God’s part—the calling, the purpose.
  - God awakens and enables this love.

God is working together all things for the good of those who love Him, those who He has called according to his grand plan. That is God’s promise to believers, and it is comprehensive. In light of this comprehensive promise of God, will you not live for him now?

- **The comprehensive purpose of God (29–30)** – <sup>29</sup> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* <sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

But that is when Paul decides to tell us more about the purpose of God in verses 29 and 30 and how it relates to believers (*cf. “those whom”*). The first word of verse 29 in most English Bibles is “for,” which reveals that Paul is unfolding in greater detail how God’s purpose relates to those who love God. That is, Paul is unfolding more about the eternal purpose of God for believers, and he does so by describing an unbreakable chain of God’s actions toward believers.

***Let’s read verses 29–30 to find five ways God secures believers in His eternal purpose.***

These are things that God has done to secure believers. We can be confident that future glories are far weightier than present sufferings because God secures these things for us in five significant ways.

- **It includes foreknowledge.**

First, God “foreknew” (προέγνω) us. Let me point out a few things here.

- This word literally means “to know beforehand.”
- It is not used that much in the NT—five times and only one other time by Paul.
- In Rom 11:2, we learn that God knew Israel beforehand.
- Now, in our text, the object of God’s prior knowledge is not the Israelite people.

- Neither is he talking about things or events in this life.
- Instead, he is speaking of people.
  - Get that?
  - The text says, “those whom.”
  - See that?
  - God knew “us” in advance.
- This word then speaks of God knowing believers before they knew him. But when did God know us beforehand?
- Well, one other text speaks to the timing of God’s foreknowledge of believers.
- This other text tells us when foreknowledge occurs.
- Concerning God’s prior knowledge of Christ, 1 Pet 1:20 says, “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake.”
- Consequently, Paul likely means that God’s foreknowledge of believers is from of old—before time, before even the foundations of the world were laid down.
- That is, this is God’s pre-temporal knowledge of those who would love him.
- **It includes predestination.**

Now, those whom God foreknew in this way, he also “predestined” (προώρισεν). Some of you have been waiting for this moment! You knew it was coming because we go verse-by-verse. You knew that I would eventually have to get here. So, let’s start simple.

- The word is here! This is not just something that I put in my own translation—“Brent’s English Version.” We cannot say, “Well, I do not believe in predestination” because the word *is* here!
- The word is here and it means “to preplan a destiny, to desire beforehand, or to determine in advance.” In other words, “predestination” is God’s pre-temporal planning or determining. But what is determined in advance? Well, let’s let Scripture set that for us, not our pre-conceived ideas or what we have been taught before.
- In the Scripture, two subjects were pre-determined.

- THE EVENTS OF THE CROSS

- In Acts 4:28 Peter and John lead the people to consider how the rulers and kings gathered together against Jesus in fulfillment of Psalm 2. In those prayers, they say that these rulers came together “to do whatever” God’s hand and plan had “predestined” to take place. That is, God had determined in advance that Jesus must suffer and die on the cross. That is the object of God’s predestination in Acts 4.
- In 1 Cor 2:7 Paul agrees. He describes God’s “wisdom” found in the cross to be something that God predestined. None of the rulers of this age knew it or else they would not have participated in crucifying him (cf. 2:8). Consequently, it is established on the basis of scripture

without any doubt that God knew that Jesus would be crucified for our sins before those events ever took place. Jesus was predestined for the cross. Now, are you grateful that God predetermined the destiny of Jesus for the cross?

- **BELIEVERS FOR ADOPTION & INHERITANCE** – There are only two other places where this word is used, and both are found in Ephesians.
  - In Eph 1:5, we—believers—are the objects of God’s predestination. God predetermined our destiny which, in this text, is adoption as sons and daughters through the work of Jesus.
  - In Eph 1:11, we are the objects of God’s predetermination as well. Having been predestined by God, we have obtained an inheritance. Are you grateful that God predetermined that you would be adopted and enjoy a heavenly inheritance? You see, when I read my Bible, I do not grimace when I come to the word “predestined.” It is not a bad word! It is a good word! I rejoice when I see this word!

Rom 8:29 follows along with the two Ephesians passages. God predetermines believers (“*those whom*”) for conformity to the image of His son. That is, God determined in eternity past that believers would be conformed to the image of his son. And what God determines to happen will happen.

Men and women, there is nothing controversial about that! This is good! This is true! This is what the Bible says! If any controversy exists, it might be regarding the word “election” that is not even found in this passage (*I do not find that one controversial either, but we will work through that in texts that mention it!*).

Do not let anyone rob you of the joy of predestination! The destination that God marked out in advance for all believers is to look like Jesus and He did this so that Jesus would have many brothers and sisters so that the family resemblance would be obvious.

Now, the next link of the unbreakable chain is the calling of God. After God foreknew and predestined us, he called us out. This is when we go from eternity past to the present.

Now, I want to point out something about the nature of this calling. Who are the objects of God’s calling here? Well, in the text, it is those whom God has already foreknown and predestined. And might I add, it is all those whom He has done these things for. That is, Paul is talking about an “effective” or “effectual” call—one that works. Paul is going down the line of a list of things that God has done for believers, and he has no breaks here.

- **It includes justification.**

And that is obvious as one continues to read. This group of people who have been foreknown and predestined and called are justified. We have considered this important word before. This is God’s legal declaration that we are no longer guilty for our sins because Jesus endured the punishment for our sins on the cross. We are made righteous in him.

- **It ends in glorification.**

Finally, Paul closes with “glorification” in verse 30. This brings his whole argument to a close and draws our attention back to his premise in verse 18. This passage is about future glories, again and again. They are so much better!

But let’s consider a few important things about this last word!

- Being “glorified” is the final stage in the process of redemption where our inner beings (*soul-spirit*) are made new, and we are given glorified bodies.
- This speaks of our being given a high (“to be lifted up”) and great existence like our Savior.
- Yet, Paul describes this future glory as something that is already happened in God’s plan—we are glorified.
- “Paul is looking at the believer’s glorification from the perspective of God.”<sup>204</sup>
- It is guaranteed!

Men and women, this is what God does “for those who love Him ... for those who are called according to his purpose.” He secures us! In light of this, will not you live for future glories now?

We started by describing the value of saving now for retirement. Financial advisors proclaim the earlier and longer you live this way—the better. My task as a preacher is harder—but far more important. I call you on the authority of God’s word to live for future glories now! This is a spiritual call—it requires the Spirit’s prompting and calling. May He do it in us!

This is how great men and women of God have lived throughout every generation. It has led people to give up everything and go to China or India or the Philippines or Israel. It’s led them to leave parents and children and grandchildren to do something radical and risky in light of the great and weighty eternal glories ahead.

## **5. It delivers from anything that threatens to separate us from Christ’s love (8:31–39).**

Have you ever felt that God has abandoned or neglected you? Have you ever said to God: “If you love me, why are you letting this happen to me?” What should we do in those moments?

Don Cormack offers a powerful account of believers who experienced great darkness in his book: *Killing Fields, Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church—the Church that Would not Die*. He tells the story of a handful of Christians who were executed by the Communist rule of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970’s.

- One Cambodian man, Hain, lived in Cambodia with his family.
  - They were Christians.
  - In 1975, one night they were taken captive by soldiers with semi-automatic guns.

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<sup>204</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 536.

- They had committed no crimes!
- They were arrested simply because they loved Jesus—they were followers of Jesus.
- The soldiers tied up the whole family and let them suffer through the entire evening.
- Throughout the night, they prayed, cried, and sang hymns.
- And at dawn, they knew what was coming!
- A soldier came to them and gave them shovels and made them dig one big grave.
- Once the grave had been dug, Hain asked for a time of prayer with his family. They joined together on their knees—hand in hand.
- After his prayer, Hain urged the soldiers to repent and trust Christ.
- Let me read you a portion of Don Cormack’s account:

*In a panic one of Hain’s youngest sons leapt to his feet, bolted into the surrounding brush, and disappeared. Hain jumped up and with amazing coolness and authority prevailed upon the Khmer Rouge not to pursue the lad but to allow him to call the boy back. The knots of onlookers cheering around trees, the Khmer Rouge and the stunned family still kneeling at the grave side looked on in awe as Hain began calling for his son, pleading with him to return and die together with his family. He called out, ‘What comparison, my son, stealing a few more days in the wilderness, a fugitive wretched and alone, to joining your family here momentarily around this grave, but very soon around the throne of God, free forever in paradise.’ After a few tense minutes, the brush parted and the lad weeping, walked slowly back to his place with the kneeling family. ‘Now, we are ready to go,’ Hain told the Khmer Rouge.*

As we read this true account, we might wonder what sustained them! What was the key! How can we make it through our own dark moments and trials?

Well, in our passage this morning, we will consider something that will help us in difficult moments. This text is enjoyable in our best moments, but it is crucial in our worst!

Paul’s words in Romans 8:31–39 are a combination of prose and poetry. There are parts of this closing passage that appear to be a hymn or song that Paul composes to finish out his marvelous reflection on everything that God did for us in the death of His Son. The way Paul arranges this conclusion is around an opening question (v. 31a) and specific elaborations (vv. 31b–39).

**a. Initial Question (31a) – <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things?**

The initial question is pretty simple and fairly common in Paul’s writings. Paul asks, “what then shall we say to these things?”

The question starts with Paul’s famous: “What then?” or “What shall we say then?”

- He has used this question often in Romans (10xs; 3:1, 9; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30; 11:7) to think about how someone should *respond* to what he has been arguing.

To this simple question, Paul adds the subject that calls for a response—“these things” (ταῦτα).

- What exactly he refers to here, is a bit mysterious.
- Paul might have the blessings that he’s been articulating in the whole book or the whole chapter in mind.

- More likely, however, we can say that it refers back to what he has just been saying in the previous verses.

It has been a long time since we thought about those verses, however. So, let me just briefly remind you.

- In **Rom 8:15**, Paul says that we have not been given a spirit of slavery to fear but that we have been given “the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” So, how should we respond to that?
- In **Rom 8:18**, Paul states that the glory that will be revealed in us is so much better than present sufferings that they should not even be compared. So, how should we respond to that?
- In **Rom 8:28**, Paul declares that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to God’s purpose.” How should we respond to that?
- Finally, in **Rom 8:29–30**, Paul exclaims that those who have been foreknown by God are also predestined, called, justified, and glorified. In other words, these things are an unbreakable chain for believers in Jesus Christ. If you get foreknowledge, you get glorification and all the rest!

Well, since that is true, how should we respond? What should we say?

## b. Specific Elaborations (31b–39)

Well, Paul says, “Let me elaborate!” Paul expounds on *what* a proper response looks like for the rest of the chapter. Now, the way Paul does this is by asking the question: “Who?”

- If you look closely at your Bible, you will see that he asks that question four times throughout the rest of the passage (vv. 31b, 33a, 34a, 35a).
  - This is a very important observation in the passage that helps you see how Paul develops his argument.
  - He has an argument here!
  - As much as this passage is praise—a hymn of praise—it is not just random!
  - It is not just everything that Paul has to say about the subject!
  - It is orderly and it moves somewhere!
  - I might encourage you to circle the “who’s” in the passage! 😊
- Simply stated, Paul asks, “Who can oppose us? Who can charge us? Who can condemn us? Who can detach us?”
- Now, asking these questions is not an end in itself for Paul.
  - No, asking the questions allows Paul to make some significant affirmations as well.
  - Those affirmations or responses follow the four questions (vv. 32, 33b, 34b, 35b–39).
  - You see, Paul does not just want a general response or an incorrect one.
  - No, he tells us exactly what a proper response to these things are.

### 1) 1<sup>st</sup> Q & A (31b–32)

So, let’s dig into the “1<sup>st</sup> Q & A.” The question is in the middle of verse 31. **Read it.**

**a) Question #1: Who can oppose us (31b)?** *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

The first question can literally be translated: “Who ... against us?” The verb “is” must be supplied in English. What Paul is most concerned with here, however, is the word “against.”

- As a matter of fact, the next two questions also contain this word.
- So, it is not only who is against us, who can bring accusations against us, and who can bring judgment against us.

We start with this first one though—“Who is against us?” Paul is saying, “No one can oppose us if God is for us.” Now, two things should probably be mentioned at this point.

- **First, Paul uses a condition to describe us as the ones “God is for.”**
  - He says, “If God is for us.”
  - We have already learned in the book that it is only through believing in the gospel of Jesus that anyone can be forgiven by God.
  - It is my belief then that “God is for us” is another way of saying that we have believed in the gospel.
  - That is the only way God is for us in the sense that Paul intends here.
- **Second, when Paul asks: “Who is against us?” he does not mean that no one will ever oppose us.**
  - This is important! Catch it!
  - Paul does not mean that no one will ever oppose us.
  - You see, Paul himself could talk from his own experience about intense and varied opposition against him.<sup>205</sup>
  - Further, if you keep reading in this very text, Paul considers the *danger* and *affliction* and *persecution* that believers face from their opponents in this life!
  - Paul’s point with the simple question then, is not to say we will not have opponents, but to totally minimize the opponents when compared with God.
    - His point is that even if the entire world would join against me in battle, they would not stand a chance!
    - If God is for me, then who do they think they are fighting against us!
    - No one will be able to successfully oppose Him!

**b) Answer: God will certainly take care of all things (32).** <sup>32</sup> *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

But we should probably look to Paul’s actual answer in verse 32. After asking who can oppose us if God is for us, Paul answers. **Look at verse 32.**

Although this is in the form of another question, it functions as Paul’s answer to the preceding question about who can successfully oppose us. Paul reasons that God gave his best for us when He gave us his only begotten Son.

- Since He has already provided for us in such an extravagant way, why would we question whether he will come through for us in other areas.

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<sup>205</sup> For similar language, see Moo, *Romans*, 539.

- More specifically, Paul wonders why we could not trust him to give us “all things.”
- Now, Paul likely has the future day in mind when God hands all things over to Jesus.
- Paul understands that believers will share in the lordship of Jesus over all things!
- You see, instead of opponents successfully being against us in the future, we will rule and reign with Jesus over all things.

## 2) 2<sup>nd</sup> Q & A (33)

That leads to the second Q & A. It begins with another question in verse 33. **Let’s look there.**

### a) Question #2: Who will charge us (33a)? <sup>33</sup> *Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?*

This second question also involves people who are against us. With this question, however, Paul wants to consider whether anyone will be able to accuse us or bring legal charges against us in the future judgment.

Now, Paul’s language here is poetic and the reference to “God’s elect” is a case of choosing a verb and an object which start with the same letters and sound (*egkaleo; eklekton*).

More important, however, is to see that we are God’s elect ones. No one will successfully be able to bring accusations against us in the future because it is God who not only elects us, but who justifies us.

### b) Answer: God justifies us (33b). *It is God who justifies.*

Instead of someone pronouncing charges against us at the future judgment, God pronounces us righteous! Paul’s answer here involves the first member of the Godhead. No one messes with God’s elect because it is He who justifies them.

## 3) 3<sup>rd</sup> Q & A (34)

Then Paul considers the next Q & A. It starts with a question in verse 34 that he also answers in the verse. **Let’s look there.**

### a) Question #3: Who can condemn us (34a)? <sup>34</sup> *Who is to condemn?*

Paul is not only concerned about answering who can oppose or accuse us, now he asks who can condemn us.

- If no one can even accuse us, we should probably figure that no one can condemn us either.
- In a legal setting like this one, condemnation is the opposite of justification.
- To be seen as one who deserves punishment is the opposite of one who is released from punishment.

### b) Answer: Jesus defends us (34b). *Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

In a similar way to this last question, Paul’s formal answer involves a member of the Godhead. This time, however, it is Christ Jesus.

- When considering who can condemn us, Paul reminds us that Jesus not only died for us, but He has also risen and is seated in a place of honor near the Father interceding for us.
- The way the whole answer goes in this part of verse 34, the emphasis is placed near the end of the verse (*who indeed is ...*).
- You see, because Jesus arose and ascended on high, his love is still living and active.
  - We do not just look back at a memorial.
  - We have Jesus on high interceding before God on our behalf, and no one can condemn us because their accusations cannot be stronger than Jesus's prayers for us!

#### 4) 4<sup>th</sup> Q & A (35–39)

That leads to Paul's final question and answer. This section is longer and involves a glorious crescendo where things end on a high pitch.

- a) **Question #4: Who will detach us (35)?** <sup>35</sup> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, nor nakedness, or danger, or sword?*

Paul begins this "4<sup>th</sup> Q & A" in similar fashion with a "who" question in verse 35. The question, however, is longer and more involved than the first three. **Look with me at verse 35.**

In this section, Paul asks if anyone will be able to "separate" or "detach" us from Christ's love.

- "The verb 'separate' is a spatial term that often refers to relational separation (1 Cor 7:10–11, 15)" in the Bible.<sup>206</sup>
- So, Paul pictures two objects—us and Christ's love—and asks whether something will be able to drive us apart.

That is when Paul expands his question to consider seven "disasters that normally separate people from those they love and care for."<sup>207</sup>

- These things all occur in a context of persecution and suffering.
- Paul had faced all these things himself, except one—the last one—the sword.
  - Sword refers to a violent death—death through execution, capital punishment.
  - Yet this will prove to be the final obstacle for Paul in the years ahead.
  - Within ten years, in the city of Rome, Paul will die a martyr's death for Christ, beheaded by a sword!
- These Christians in Rome would soon be thrown into a situation where they too would have to endure these sorts of things for the cause of Christ.

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<sup>206</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 425.

<sup>207</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 425.

- This letter was written in 57 AD.
  - In seven short years, opinion in Rome would turn against the Christians.
  - On July 19, 64 AD, a great fire swept through Rome.
  - The fire lasted seven days.
  - This fire destroyed ten of the 14 wards in the city.
- Nero himself was suspected of setting this fire because it involved prime real estate for a new palace.
  - Nero, however, blamed Christians for the fire, and then had them impaled on poles, burned on torches, thrown to ravenous dogs, brutally abused, tortured, beheaded, and crucified.

Paul understands that Christians will *often* face severe persecution and affliction for the cause of Christ. His question is whether these things can detach or separate us from Christ's love.

**b) Explanation: Scripture comments on this (36).** <sup>36</sup> *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

Now, before answering that question. Paul offers a brief, parenthetical explanation about the reality of suffering affliction. In verse 36, Paul brings OT scripture to bear on whether God's people will face things like these. **Look at verse 36.**

This verse comes verbatim from Psa 44:22. This psalm is unusual within the psalter. The authors—the sons of Korah—consider the plight of the people of God. Normally, the psalmists readily admit their failures and their neglect of God. In this passage, however, the sons say that the people had not forgotten God, nor been false to the covenant (v. 17). Their heart was not turned back, and their steps had not departed from God's way (v. 18).

Yet, for God's sake, the people of Israel were being "killed all the day long" and they "were regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." They were facing a continual assault of devastating military defeats.

It is so bad the sons describe the Israelites as having "souls bowed down to the dust" with bellies "clinging to the ground" (v. 25). So, the sons conclude by calling God to "awake"—to "rouse himself"—to "rise up" and "come to their help" (vv. 23, 26).

You see, Paul understands that this is nothing new! It is not a new thing for God's people to unjustly face cruelty and killing. As a matter of fact, many Jewish rabbis used this particular verse [like Paul] to describe the "death of the martyrs."<sup>208</sup> So, Paul quotes this Psalm to give scriptural testimony to the reality of suffering and affliction in the life of God's people.

**c) Answer: Nothing can detach us from God's love for us (37–39).**

After asking the question and giving testimony to the normalcy about affliction, Paul concludes with a final answer that demonstrates his confidence that nothing can detach us from God's love. **Read verses 37–39.**

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<sup>208</sup> Harvey, *Romans*, 218.

- **His answer (37)** – <sup>37</sup> *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Paul's answer could not be clearer. He starts out with the bold word, "No." Instead of these things separating me from God's love, in the experience of these trials, we are "more than conquerors" (ὑπερνικῶμεν).

- This translation comes from a compound word that means to "win a victory over" or "overwhelmingly conquer."
- And this victory is for those whom God has loved—only these whom God has loved, only those overwhelmingly conquer!

I love the opening of the old song: "O love that will not let me go. I rest my weary soul in thee." Indeed, God's love for us in Jesus is unbreakable!

- **His confidence (38–39)** – <sup>38</sup> *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* <sup>39</sup> *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Just stating this is not enough for Paul, however. In his powerful crescendo, Paul then expresses his confidence in the victory by considering ten realities that cannot separate us in a rhythmic cadence. He says,

- **Neither death nor life** – The first two portray the two end possibilities of facing affliction. Whether they live or die, no experience will separate believers from God's love.
- **Nor angels nor rulers** – From there Paul considers whether supernatural or natural rulers could destroy us. Neither demons nor wicked human governmental authorities can detach us from God's love.
- **Nor things present nor things to come** – Nothing that we face in time can do it either. Throughout the natural course of our lives, no present or future event can rip us away from God's love.
- **Nor powers**
- **Nor height nor depth** – Nothing we face in space can do it either. The best way to categorize height and depth is that they are either extreme astronomical or spatial terms.
  - I think the point is spatial.
  - "Neither the highest height [*the heights of heaven*] nor the deepest depth [*the depths of the unfathomable sea*] will be able to separate us from God's love."<sup>209</sup>
  - So, this is the Psalm 139 of the NT!
  - Do you remember that psalm?
  - How about this: "If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me." (139:8–10).

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<sup>209</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 443.

- **Nor anything else in all creation** – And then, finally, Paul moves to anything else in all of creation—all the powers of death, all the circumstances of life, all of space, all of time, all of reality. Paul is considering here powers that affect our very health and life and with this last expression he “covers any gaps ... left.”<sup>210</sup>

***Oh, what a difference a chapter makes!***

- Near the end of Romans 7, Paul is somber.
  - He talks about the law in his members that is always present, always bringing him into captivity to the law of sin and death.
  - He says, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
- Now, however, having articulated what God is doing for us through Jesus, Paul exclaims the glories of God’s victorious, relentless, unbreakable love for us!

Well, this is Paul’s song, and it sustained him through all these things!

- So, when you begin to doubt in the dark, remember Paul’s song and sing it, brothers and sisters—Nothing can separate us from God’s love!
- When you face death or trial, remember...
  - It is an unbreakable bond.
  - It is glue that will hold us and help us all the way through.
- And when your accusers and opponents gather and descend, when your trials and afflictions overwhelm, remember that through this love you will overwhelmingly conquer.
  - May we in these moments sing—“When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.”
  - May God’s love steady you, brothers and sisters, knowing that nothing can detach you from that!

**C. Its history (9:1–11:36)**

It has been a joy to work through the first half of Romans with you! As we turn forward in our Bibles to the second half, I am not oblivious to the fact that most people and churches avoid Romans 9–11 in their teaching and preaching series.

- These chapters are quite challenging! So, it is with some fear and trembling that I enter into these chapters with you!
- N. T. Wright characterized these chapters well. He said, “Everything about Romans 9–11 is controversial.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 428.

<sup>211</sup> Wright, “Romans,” *NIBC*, 620.

- In another place he elaborated on how some people see Romans: “As a book with eight chapters of ‘gospel’ at the beginning, four of ‘application’ at the end, and three of puzzle in the middle.”<sup>212</sup>

This Christmas break our family started putting together puzzles—at least some of us did! It is funny to see the differences in our children when it comes to the patience and skill necessary to put puzzles together.

- Some of my children love puzzles; others barely tolerate them!
- Even twins can see these things entirely different from each other.

Well, Romans 9–11 is like a 10,000 piece puzzle! It requires wisdom, patience, perseverance, and spiritual illumination.

So, why should you even care? Why should you try? Well, it is the Bible! But let me add another thought—what our founding pastor used to say. “If you get Romans right, then you get the whole Bible right!” The point of this statement is to say that this book and these chapters contain some of the most significant theological matters found anywhere in the Bible.

So, let’s look at them a bit more. This morning, we will take a different approach where we will ...

- 1) look at how the whole section fits together because it is so big it will take us a long time (16 Sundays!),
- 2) consider Paul’s reasons and goals for writing them, and then
- 3) finish by looking at the first five verses of Romans 9.

- **A Survey-**

So, let’s start by looking at the bigger picture. You ready?!? Now, what are these three chapters about?

- Well, we could answer that in different ways!
  - How about with one word?
  - In 9:4, Paul captures it.
  - He says, “They are Israelites.”
  - These chapters are about Israel.
- In Rom 1:16–17, Paul lays out a thesis for the whole letter when he says that the gospel is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, “to the Jew first and then to the Greek.”<sup>213</sup>
    - So, these chapters explain to us more about what Paul means that the gospel came first “to the Jew.”
  - I had the privilege of earning a PhD at a great school in Australia and was exposed to biblical scholars on their faculty.
    - One of those was Mike Bird, a short, red haired Australian with a fiery personality, a sarcastic wit, and a commentary on Romans.

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<sup>212</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenants*, 231.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Murray, *Romans*, xii.

- He helpfully summarizes that Romans 9–11 are about Israel in the 1) past (Rom 9), 2) present (Rom 10), and 3) future (Rom 11).
  - That is mainly true!
- And what an important time for us to thinking correctly about Israel!
- Historically, there have been only a handful of times when it would have been more important for us to think about God’s chosen people, the Israelites, in a proper way.
  - Today, they experience much animosity and hatred, not only from Hamas, but all across the world, including now within our own country.
  - Yet these chapters make it clear that the nation of Israel retains a special place in God’s heart, so much so, that one day He will send a Deliverer to rescue them!
  - So, in God’s good plan for us, we are going to be hearing much about Israel in the weeks and months ahead and I pray that God uses it to help us think correctly about the Jewish nation.

Near the beginning of these chapters, Paul begins by saying that the problem with Israel is not with God.

- In Rom 9:6a, it says, “It is not as though the word of God has failed” (9:6a).
- He then explains that “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (9:6b).
- Now, to make more sense out of this, Paul illustrates through Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau that not all descendants of Abraham and Isaac were part of God’s people.

That leads Paul to ask his common question: “What shall we say then” (9:14a)? And add another: “Is there injustice on God’s part” (9:14b)? His answer is that there is no way the problem rests with God.

This leads Paul into a deeper discussion of how God has the right to have mercy and compassion on whomever He wants and then considers that God can do what he wants with vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy.

- This is where he brings in a *host of OT passages* to prove God’s right as sovereign creator to do what he wants with people like a potter who molds clay.
- To this explanation, Paul later adds the illustration of the olive tree that has natural branches (*Israel*) broken off and a wild olive shoot grafted in (*Gentiles*) to explain how things stand in the present.

Paul does not end there, however.

- In a mysterious and powerful move at the end of these chapters, Paul says that one day in the future “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob” (11:26b) and this will be the time that he will “take away their sins” (11:27b).
- That is, at a time in a future, Paul says, “All Israel will be saved.” (11:26a).
- In other words, God is not done with his people Israel and will one day do something for them that has never been done before—they will all be delivered!

And, of course, all this is too much for Paul so that he ends with one of the most powerful doxologies ever created! He says, “Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable ... How inscrutable ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (11:33–36).

- **Paul’s Reasons for Rom 9–11-**

That is a brief glance at what we will explore in more detail in the coming weeks. But let's do one other foundational thing before we start with 9:1. Let's ask, "Why?" "Why are these chapters here?" Have you ever asked why something was somewhere? Maybe it was a road, a church building, or a pond on a golf course. Here we will ask, "Why are these chapters here?" "What motivated Paul to write these things?"

Well, Paul has three reasons to write these things.

- **A Personal Reason** – Paul devotes the beginning of each of the three chapters to declare his own love for the Israelites (*read 9:1–4a; 10:1; 11:1*).
  - It seems that Paul might be concerned that some readers might question his commitment to the Jewish nation.
  - The author James Dunn writes, "Paul himself was conscious that his position was open to misunderstanding."<sup>214</sup>
  - So, Paul wants to make it abundantly clear in these chapters, that he is not happy that so many Jewish people are rejecting the gospel that he preaches.
  - He is not unattached; on the contrary, the present rejection of so many Israelites was tearing him to pieces.
- **A Theological Reason** – To this personal reason, Paul adds a theological one. Paul not only wants to defend his own love for Israel, he defends God's love for them. Now, this reason strikes closer to the heart of the chapters and explains their place in the book. Let me articulate what Paul has to say about God's love for Israel in two ways.
  - Although Israel rejected Jesus, God's continued love for them can be seen in the miraculous, future day when the Deliverer comes from heaven to deliver the nation. As we have said previously, God is not done with Israel. They remain His chosen people. Paul's declarations of God's love for Israel occur in every chapter.
  - This theological reason is not without purposes for Gentile believers as well. Imagine the heights a Gentile believer might experience as he hears Paul's impressive case at the end of Romans 8.
    - Do you remember how we treated that section last week?
    - In 8:31–39, Paul asks questions about who could 1) oppose or 2) accuse or 3) condemn or 4) separate us!
    - His answers to all these questions were no one; nothing.
    - At the end of the chapter, Gentile believers might be thoroughly and utterly convinced of the unfailing, unbreakable love of God.
    - Nothing can detach us from God's love.
    - The heights of *ecstasy* and *joy*!
    - But an alert reader might ask important questions here: What about Israel? Did not God love Israel before the church? Did He not articulate his love to them as well? If God's promises and commitment to Israel have not come to fruition and they have been replaced, how can we be sure that the great promises made to the church in Romans 8 will be fulfilled?
    - Let me illustrate. Do you remember when you were a child and one day your mother walked into your room with a whole host of new outfits and clothes from your older brother or sister? It was a great day for you! You got all this slightly used stuff and you basked in these

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<sup>214</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 531.

advantages—that was until that same mother came into your room one day and took away all your clothes and gave them to your little brother or sister!

- Do you see my point?
  - At the heart of this chapter, is a very important defense of God’s character.
  - If God does not come through and fulfill His promises to Israel, then people will question His integrity and commitment to the church.
  - So, technically, what we have in these chapters is a theodicy—a vindication of God and his dealings with men and women.
- **A Doctrinal Reason** – That leads to Paul’s final purpose for these chapters—his doctrinal reason for writing the chapters. You see, Paul not only wants to defend the genuineness of God’s love for Israel, he also wants to declare the universal sovereignty of God over all things—all nature, all beings, all times, and all events in world and salvation history.
- Ask any believer—Do you believe in the sovereignty of God?—and the answer is normally yes!
  - I mean, who wants to be the Christian who says, “I do not believe in the sovereignty of God!”
  - But if you ask a few more questions, it becomes obvious that many Christians put huge caveats and qualifications on sovereignty so that what is left is not the sovereignty of the Lord at all but His submission.
- But if God is not truly and wholly sovereign, then He is not God!
  - We might want him to have all power and to know all things about the future, but we sometimes struggle with his sovereignty over all things related to salvation.
- So, Paul addresses that in these chapters as well by building off what the OT said about Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and by giving illustrations like the potter and the clay.
  - Paul defends God’s sovereignty over all his created universe.
  - That is the third reason he wrote Romans 9–11.

Now, having explained these foundational things about Romans, let’s dig into the very beginning. For the second half of our time, I want to look at the first five verses of Romans 9.

## 1. Why has Israel failed (9:1–10:21)?

### a. Who is not to blame (9:1–29)

#### 1) The blame is not Paul’s (9:1–5).

These verses are the introduction to the whole section. Both the introduction and conclusion (*the great doxology*) of these chapters conclude with the word, “Amen” (see 9:5; 11:36).

This introduction fulfills a purpose in Paul’s main argument, however. He is not just setting up everything with preliminary and background information; no, he fills this introduction with expressions of his sincerity, strong feelings, and sacrificial love.

As we consider this passage, we will learn more about what true love for the lost looks like.

- Paul wants his readers to have no doubts about the deep commitments that he feels toward his unbelieving, fellow Jews, and it is to our advantage that he spells out his love so clearly.
- I cannot think of many better texts in the Bible to teach us more clearly about love (*perhaps 1 Corinthians 13*).

Today, we will learn from this passage how to cultivate a deep love for unbelievers around us!

**a) Paul's sincerity and strong feelings (1–2)** – <sup>1</sup> *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—*<sup>2</sup> *that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.*

Now, Paul's argument in the introduction is made in two sentences—two points! The first sentence shows his sincerity and strong feelings. **Look with me at verses 1 and 2.**

The very first word in the Greek is “truth.” It stands out on an island all about itself. Paul starts by calling the Romans to consider the truth about his own sincere love for the Israelite people. So, Paul makes a three-fold statement with multiple witnesses that he is writing the truth.

- First, Paul is speaking out of his union “in Christ.” This is a way of saying that he is not speaking independently—Christ is with him.
- To this he adds the testimony of his conscience.
  - Conscience is an internal component of our personalities which monitors our conformity to a moral standard.
  - Of course, we know that the conscience is fallible and fallen and not always reliable.
  - But that is not what Paul is trying to point out here.
  - Here, he speaks of the positive value of a clear conscience.
  - You see, our conscience monitors all our thoughts and actions and reports about it to ourselves.
  - For Paul, he speaks of a clear or good conscience that bears testimony about his genuine love for the Israelite people.
  - As a matter of fact, if you look closely, Paul adds something important in the last phrase of verse 1.
  - He says that his conscience is “certified by”<sup>215</sup> or “informed by”<sup>216</sup> the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit also bears witness.

What follows reflects the true feelings of Paul for the Israelites. He is genuine! What does your conscience testify about your life?

- Next, Paul reveals what he feels in his heart. He says that he feels “great sorrow” (*deep, intense sadness*) and “unceasing anguish” (*unrelenting pain*) for them. So, it is good for us to see here that all this is not impersonal for Paul. He is not just giving his philosophy of history, he is talking about something that affects him greatly, regularly, deeply.

**b) Paul's sacrificial love (3–5)** – <sup>3</sup> *For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*<sup>4</sup> *They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.*<sup>5</sup> *To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

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<sup>215</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 2.

<sup>216</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 479.

But when we move from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence we see just how far Paul's love for his own people goes. **Look with me at the second sentence of Paul's introduction in verses 3–5.**

The reason for Paul's unceasing pain is that Paul's desire goes so far that he would cut himself off from Christ (if he could!) for his kinsmen to be saved. For any person who thinks Paul has abandoned or reneged on his people, they need to think again!

Now, the language here is important.

- First, Paul does not actually think that he could do this. He says, “I could wish”—he knows he cannot be a substitute for them. That is not how things go! A sinful man like Paul cannot become a curse for others.
- Second, Paul's language here is very similar to two other people we find in the Bible.
  - Paul may have learned to think this way from Moses. That is, he reflects the same language that Moses had for the Jewish people (*read Exod 32:1–6 then his intercession in 32:7–14 and 31–35*).
  - Yet there is another person that might have caused Paul to think this way. His love is patterned after the love of Jesus for sinners. Gal 3:13 and 2 Cor 5:21 describe how he became a curse for us so that we might be saved.
  - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us!
  - Of course, Paul could not act as a substitute, but his desire for them is strong!

Finally, near the end, Paul reviews eight blessings that the Israelites enjoyed: 1) adoption (*God's act of bringing Israel into relationship with him as a 'son'*), 2) the glory (*this speaks of God's glorious presence in the wilderness*), 3) the covenants (*Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New*), 4) the law (*the code of rules given to Moses*), 5) worship (*worship in the Tabernacle, Temple; sacrifices*), 6) the promises (*to Abraham and David*), 7) the patriarchs (*fathers*), and 8) the Messiah.

Now, there is much controversy about the end of verse 5. The final part of this verse can speak of Christ or the Father.

- It is probably better to see it as a reference to Christ.
- All these things are true about Jesus: He is 1) over all, 2) he is God, and 3) he is blessed forever.
- This is the traditional view of the early Greek fathers and fits better with Paul's lament over Israel rejecting Christ!
- How could they reject such a Divine Messiah? He is “God over all things”

Oh, the bitter pill this was for Paul, who possessed deep, genuine love for his own people. What about us? Who do you love this way?

- My mind thinks of two of our own assembly who have abandoned all their plans to go to Israel to show the gospel to the Jewish people!
- Do you have any people you care about in this way?
- I wish that we had more of Paul's spirit.
- Do you feel anguish for the lost—even your own families?
- Some do, I have talked to you about it.

- But how about others? Do you care about your own flesh and blood?
  - Do you care about them?
  - Do you believe they are damned because of their sin?
  - Do you have unrelenting pain and concern for them?
  - OR do you dismiss Paul because is he eccentric or ancient?

Let's cry out to God to cultivate a love for our own families and our own nation and God's special people, Israel, in our own hearts today!

## 2) The blame is not God's (9:6–29).

In Romans 9–10, Paul considers who is not (9:1–29) and who is to blame (9:30–10:21) for the present rejection of Israel. He started on a personal note, defending his own love for the people of Israel (9:1–5). Paul experiences great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart concerning Israel's hardness. We looked more at that "deep love" last week.

Hopefully, we spend more time considering his love and praying for that same love for souls than we do debating what comes later in the passage.

- Listen, I know that it is fun to debate these things and I know that not everyone will see it the same way, but do not lose sight of the aim of the first paragraph of this chapter.
- I can say confidently that God wants you to leave those verses being struck by what real love for the lost looks like, whether it's for the Israelite nation, our own nation, or our own flesh and blood.

After initially explaining that the problem is not with himself, Paul moves quickly to defend someone else. **Read 9:6a.**

The blame for the present rejection of Israel should not be put on God either.

- Now, Paul will spend far more time defending God than he does himself.
- As a matter of fact, Paul expounds on this from verses 6 through 29.
- So, we have five verses defending Paul's love and twenty-four defending God.

We will take five weeks to look at Paul's defense of God that comes in this section.

Now, as we go through such texts about who God is and how He works, I would start by calling you to open your mind and heart to embrace all that God's Word teaches here!

- Andy Naselli and JD Crowley authored an excellent book on the *Conscience* that I often recommend.
- In the book, they use the illustration of a bathroom scale that is consistently off 5 lbs. in its measurements.<sup>217</sup>
  - It says that you weigh 110 lbs., but you actually weigh 115 lbs.
  - Well, which measurement is better?
  - Whichever is lower, right?

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<sup>217</sup> Andy D. Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience*, 34.

- Well, which measurement is accurate?
  - Now, what should we do to our scale if it consistently measures this way?
  - We calibrate it; we realign it with truth so that it is accurate!
  - Now, none of us come to the Bible without pre-conceived and sometimes fallible ideas and interpretations.
  - None of us are right on every controversial subject and we should admit that!
  - So, when someone shows us teaching from Scripture that contradicts our previously held positions, we should joyfully realign our views with Scripture.
  - That will probably happen to each of us as we walk through Romans 9–11.
  - Is that ok? Will you joyfully submit? Will you gladly realign your views with Scripture?
  - Some asked last week, “What is so controversial?”
  - Well, get ready!
  - These next five weeks will be interesting!
- In this section, it might be easy for us to object and to blame God.
  - Paul knows this and patiently answers the questions his readers might have about God.
- There is nothing more important for you than your view of God and this text shapes that!

Today, we will consider Paul’s first argument that comes in verses 6–13, although I am going to save fuller consideration of verses 10–13 until next week. ***Let’s begin by reading the whole passage.***

**a) God is reliable: He always comes through on his promises (6–13).**

The blame for why so many Israelites reject the gospel is not God’s. Now, the way that Paul proves that includes an important thesis (9:6) and two confirming illustrations (9:7–13).

- **The important thesis (9:6)**

Let’s start with the thesis. Many commentators see this not only as the thesis statement of this paragraph, but of the whole section—all of Romans 9–11. Consequently, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this single sentence! It contains two simple—but significant—parts.

- **The thesis itself (6a)** – <sup>6</sup> *But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*

Everything starts with the thesis itself. ***Look again at the first half of verse 6.***

In response to all the blessings and benefits that Israel enjoyed as the people of God (vv. 4 and 5), Paul inserts a “but.” This is a very important transition. Paul’s insertion is that you cannot say that God’s word has failed. But let’s look more clearly at this thesis, by answering three questions.

- **What “word”?** The first question is: What “word of God” does Paul have in mind here?
  - Well, I like how John Murray answers this question: “The ‘word of God’ should be understood in a more specific sense and not in the sense of

Scripture as a whole or of the word of the truth of the gospel. It is the word of promise in the covenants alluded to in verse 4.”<sup>218</sup>

- So, Paul has a certain word from God in mind, his covenant promises.
  - That best fits the context!
- **So, then we ask—“Why?” Why not just say promise, why say word?** The answer to that question is that Paul has an OT text in his mind when he talks about the “Word of God” failing.

That text is Isa 40:6–8. Do you remember Isaiah 40? It is a powerful chapter that talks about God’s power and glory! Now, these verses say, <sup>6</sup> *All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.* <sup>7</sup> *The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.* <sup>8</sup> *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

Now let me point out words that Paul repeats from this passage in the LXX.

He repeats...

- “Word of God” – 9:6a
- “Fades/Falls” – “failed” in 9:6a
- “Flesh” – 9:8a
- “Will stand” – “might continue” in 9:11b

So, when Paul thinks about God’s unbreakable promises that will stand, he thinks of this great text! It’s not God’s Word that fails; it is flesh that fails!

- **Finally, we ask—So what? What is the significance of this statement?**
- Well, the main point of Paul’s thesis is that God’s promises are not like weak, little, withering, and falling flowers.
  - No, God’s promises stand!
  - As a matter of fact, Paul emphatically rejects the premise that God’s promises have failed by putting the word “not” at the very beginning of the verse!
    - “Not—God’s word has failed.”
  - Now, this is an important truth for us to believe!
    - God is perfectly reliable!
      - When He says something, it happens.
      - When He promises something, it is fulfilled.
    - As a matter of fact, if you ever think that something God has said in His Word is untrue or has failed to actually happen, then you need to understand that you have misunderstood the promise!

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<sup>218</sup> Murray, *Romans 9–16*, 9.

- Even if your experience seems to question it, even if your mind is leading you in some other direction, you must know that God is always faithful to his promises.
- **Support for the thesis (6b)** – *For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.*

Now, to this opening thesis, Paul adds support. You could imagine someone thinking, “Maybe God planned what He could not deliver.” “Maybe He promised more that He could fulfill.” So, Paul explains why that is not right. ***Well, let’s read Paul’s support in 9:6b.***

The theological key to this part of the verse is to consider two ways that Paul describes Israel.

- **First, he writes about “all those descended from Israel.”** This is literally speaking of all those “out of” or “from” Israel.
  - Most theologians agree on the first use of Israel here. Paul has in mind Israel as a people—ethnic Israel—as those “descended from Israel.”
- **The interpretive challenge, however, has more to do with the final use of the word “Israel.”** Paul speaks next of those who “are Israel” or “belong to Israel.”
  - This is more difficult.
  - Some believe that Paul has a new kind of Israel in mind here, a spiritual Israel, which is his way of referring to the church who replaces the community of faith.<sup>219</sup>
  - Instead, it is better to see this second reference to Israel as a narrower, smaller group within ethnic Israel.
    - So, Paul is saying, “Not all ethnic Jews were faithful or were believing Jews.”
    - With this last description of Israel, Paul has a body within ethnic Israel in mind, a certain type of old covenant people, who were genuine believers in God’s provision of salvation.

Another way of looking at these two descriptions of Israel can be seen in the text in the diagram before us: “Not all ethnic Israelites belong to the faithful, ethnic Israelites.”

- Now, to the alert reader in Romans, Paul has already been preparing us to think this way.
- In Romans 2 and 3, Paul was pricking the balloon of Jewish pride and presumption.
- He closed that argument this way—maybe you remember it:

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<sup>219</sup> See Moo for an explanation of this view. Moo, *Romans*, 573.

<sup>28</sup> *For no one is a Jew who is merely one on the outside, nor is circumcision outward and physical,* <sup>29</sup> *but a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.*

So, in Romans 9, Paul addresses an error that was probably common among Jewish people of his day “which is that they would be saved by virtue of born a Jew.”<sup>220</sup> “The substance of [Paul’s] argument [then] is that salvation was never promised to every ethnic Israelite.”<sup>221</sup> “God only unconditionally elected some Israelites.”<sup>222</sup>

Before we move on, let me make some applications for us.

- First, one lesson from this passage is that “membership in God’s people has never been merely a matter of family ties.”<sup>223</sup>
  - I heard one preacher say it this way: “Physical connection to a faithful person is never enough.”<sup>224</sup>
  - You see, this is still important for us!
    - We cannot be saved because of our grandparents or parents.
    - God will not accept you because your mother is a prayer warrior or because your father is faithful to church!
    - No, God treats every individual on the basis of what he or she has done with the gospel of his Son.
    - If you do not believe that Jesus died on the cross in your place—for your sins, and if you do not repent of your sins, then you will not be saved.
    - Men and women, this is good news! It is good news because you do not have to have connections in the church to be accepted by God.
    - You do not need to bring anything! You—yourself—must repent and believe the gospel.
    - Family connections will not save you; Jesus will!
- Second, we also learn that it is critical to grasp the true nature of God’s promises in the Bible.
  - You see, Paul’s original readers are not the only ones to ever ask—“Have the promises of God failed?”
  - If we misunderstand the nature of God’s promises to us, it can have devastating consequences for us.

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<sup>220</sup> Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 9–16*, 23.

<sup>221</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 472.

<sup>222</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 117.

<sup>223</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 450.

<sup>224</sup> From Bryan Blazosky’s sermon on Rom 9:6–9.

- If, for instance, we believe that God has promised to heal those who are pure or have enough faith and it does not happen for our friend or parent or spouse or child, then it can destroy our faith.
  - We think, “God’s weak.” “God did not come through on His promise.”
  - And it crushes us!
  - Or, in some cases, God tenderly brings us to the realization that maybe I have been lied to—maybe I have misunderstood something about the promise!
    - I think of a very special family at Colonial who could have been crushed by this false view of God, but God rescued them and brought them to us!
    - I am so thankful!
    - It is important that we embrace how the Bible actually portrays God.
    - Wrong views of God affect us all!
- Or maybe you believe that God promises to help earnest believers to achieve a higher life where you will not regularly struggle with temptations and sin.
  - In his book, *Keep in the Step with the Spirit*, J. I. Packer says that he used to hold that view of spiritual growth early in his Christian life.
  - He said he had been taught by some that if he was sincere enough—serious enough in his longings and prayers—that he could utterly defeat sin.
  - Yet, he could never achieve it.
  - It seemed that the teachers were enjoying a better experience where they were filled with the Spirit.
  - They were like passengers on a bus that he could never catch!
  - So, this almost destroyed him!
  - He almost gave up entirely until he worked through Romans 7 and 8 to see the true nature of what God actually promises.
- Or we read the Bible as a code book and do crazy things with all the numbers in Daniel and Ezekiel and Revelation so that we are convinced in our study group that Jesus will return in 2023.
  - This zeal for our perception of this coded promise pushes us along that is until 2024.
  - Then it shakes us!
  - You see, wrong views of God have serious consequences.
  - That is why this chapter is so important!
- **Two confirming illustrations (9:7–13)**

Now, in the rest of this paragraph, we come to verses that call into question some of the ways that we think about God. Again, let’s ask God to open our minds and hearts to embrace all that God’s Word teaches.

So, with that perspective, we move on to verses 7–13 and consider two illustrations that Paul offers to confirm his thesis about the problem being not with God or his promises, but with the Israelites—the sons of Jacob. Not all of them would experience God’s blessings!

So, what Paul does is he uses his Bible—the OT—to show that God has always saved only some within a group. It is not just this way with Jacob/Israel and his descendants. In the book of Genesis, we learn that the same thing happened with Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham, and his sons, and Jacob’s father, Isaac, and his sons. We can see that Paul intends two illustrations with the words “and not” (οὐδ’) in verse 7 and “and not only” (Οὐ μόνον δέ) in verse 10. Paul is saying, “Here is example one and two.”

I have been recently digging into more of my genealogical roots. It has been enjoyable.

- I have been able to trace things back to some of my great, great, great, great, great Grandparents, going back to the mid 1700’s.
- If you have ever attempted this, you know that it can be a little addicting!
- Well, anyway, in the process there are times when you just have to list some of your distant relatives because they are not in your direct family tree (*uncles, aunts, great uncles, aunts, second cousins, etc.*).
- You just want the direct line and others do not really matter for your purposes.
- Well, this is the way that it was with God and the special line of promise that came from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob.

As a matter of fact, Paul’s two OT illustrations confirm His thesis that God’s promises only directly relate to faithful, believing Israelite people. Paul considers how it was with Abraham’s sons (vv. 7–9) and Isaac’s sons (vv. 10–13).

- **Consider how it was with Abraham’s sons (7–9) – <sup>7</sup> And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”<sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”**

For sake of time, we will consider only the first this morning. **Look with me at verses 7 through 9.**

The point of these verses is to show from two sons of Abraham that God’s plan has always been selective. Of course, the two sons of Abraham that are most famous are Isaac and his step-brother, Ishmael. So, Paul will consider how Isaac and Ishmael relate to God’s promises to Abraham.

To better understand this passage, we have to consider how some important words relate to each other in the passage. We will do this twice.

- **First, we consider the words “children” (τέκνα) and “offspring” of Abraham (σπέρμα).**
  - Now, hang with me!
  - This is important.

- In these verses, Paul makes a point about the children and offspring or seed of Abraham that might be confusing to us.
- The main question we should again pursue is whether Paul intends these two words as synonyms or whether he is speaking of larger and smaller groups.
  - And, it appears, that he is again speaking of a larger and a smaller group.
  - So, which is larger?
  - Well, this is where we run into a translation issue in verse 7 that is confusing.
  - Unlike the ESV, I suggest that it should be translated like James Dunn suggests: “Nor is it that all his children are Abraham’s seed [offspring].”<sup>225</sup>
  - That is, only a few select of Abraham’s children are his seed in the way that Paul describes it here.
    - Clearly, the children are a bigger group, and the offspring are smaller.
    - Clearly, also, it is much better in the text to be offspring than children.
  - So, not all the children of Abraham were part of the seed (*consult PowerPoint diagram!*).
  - But this is not only Paul’s way of thinking, this is what the OT says.
  - To prove that only some children qualify as offspring in the qualified, biblical sense, Paul quotes the OT at the end of verse 7.
    - He quotes Gen 21:12—“Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”
    - Let me remind you of the context of this quote.
    - God had promised Abraham and Sarah a child, but after years of waiting, Sarah came up with another plan.
    - Her handmaid was given to Abraham, and they conceived a son, Ishmael.
      - But this was not God’s plan for the fulfilment of the promise.
      - God’s plan was to provide a son, supernaturally quickening Sarah’s dead womb.
    - God promised a son and He did exactly what He promised.
    - As time goes on, there is conflict between Ishmael and his half-brother, Isaac.
      - So, Sarah makes demands of Abraham.
      - She wants Abraham to send Ishmael away, but he cares for Hagar and Ishmael.

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<sup>225</sup> Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 540.

- That is when God tells Abraham, “Do not be distressed. Listen to Sarah for it is through Isaac and not through Ishmael that your seed will be called.”
  - God took care of Hagar and Ishmael, but God’s plan to bring covenant blessings will come only through Isaac.
- **Second, we consider how the words “offspring” (σπέρμα) and “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) relate to each other.**
- How do these words—offspring and promise—relate?
  - Again, Paul has Genesis texts in mind.
  - These texts spoke about Abraham’s chosen “offspring” and the “promise” that God made to him!
  - Without getting too deep into the forest here, it is important to see that Paul keeps the concept of Abraham’s offspring and the promise given to Abraham together and all of these are connected only to Isaac.
  - Isaac is the “seed” and it is through him that the “promise” will be realized.
  - When it comes to the promise, Ishmael is on the outside looking in.

Next week, we will consider this more fully and look to the next example. You may already be tempted to begin questioning the character of God in his winnowing out some and choosing others. There will be plenty of time to think more deeply about that in the weeks to come! The next few weeks will offer some texts that challenge our minds and our hearts.

This week, however, know that God is always, perfectly reliable! When He makes promises, the people those promises are intended for will receive the fulfillment of those promises. God is always faithful to fulfill His promises to those who believe.

If you have been questioning that, if you have been fussing and arguing with God, go to your knees and submit your heart to what He says in this text. It will be much better for you to surrender control to Him and know that He is always, perfectly, reliable and faithful to all His promises.

○ **Consider how it was with Isaac’s sons (10–13)**

Last week we looked at texts that defended God against any blame in the failures of contemporary Israel. Paul demands his readers know that the blame is not God’s.

- No, he is completely reliable in his promises.
- *If you struggle with the rejection of Israel, then* you need to know that God never promised to save every single Israelite person anyway: “Not all Israel (ethnic Israel) belonged to Israel (faithful, ethnic Israel).”
- And this is the way that God has always worked—He has chosen some for his covenant promises and extended to them covenant mercy, grace, and favor.

To give further credence to God’s reliability and choice to bless those to whom He’s actually promised something, Paul gives two illustrations from the OT. He wants his readers to know that this is not just true with descendants of Israel, it was also true of the grandfather and father of Isaac.

- Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, represent this.
- Not all Abraham's children were his called "seed." Isaac alone was the son of the promise.

This Sunday, we will consider the next illustration and learn that "there has always been a winnowing process" with God.<sup>226</sup> This time we will consider the sons of Isaac. You see, with God some are chosen (*Isaac, Jacob, faithful Israelites*) and some are not (*Ishmael, Esau, unfaithful Israelites*).

Our subject today concerns the single-most important topic ever addressed. It has to do with your view of God and nothing is more important about you than that. I wish that every person—every politician, every Republican, every Democrat, every Independent, every celebrity, every professional athlete, every banker, every lawyer, every builder, every home-maker, every teen-ager, every person of every tribe and nation—could hear this, could truly consider this very passage in Romans today. So, pay attention!

So, within verses 10–13, Paul builds off the example of how it was with Abraham's sons by drawing attention to Isaac's sons—"and not only" (Οὐ μόνον δέ). Now, as we consider how Paul gives this illustration, we look more closely at a conversation (vv. 10–12) and a confirmation (v. 13).

- Now, this illustration contains an "even more startling [illustration]. The two sons of Isaac, unlike Isaac and Ishmael, had the same mother as well as the same father."<sup>227</sup>
- Neither boy could argue any unique eligibility for the promises and blessings of God.

This illustration both confirms and strengthens Paul's arguments about the way God works.

- **A conversation (10–12)** – <sup>10</sup> *And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,* <sup>11</sup> *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—*<sup>12</sup> *she was told, "The older shall serve the younger."*

Paul's complex argument in verses 10–12 address a conversation that God had with Rebekah. This can be seen in the beginning and end of this section—"When Rebekah had conceived ... she was told." I want to point out three things about this conversation.

- **The timing of the conversation (10–11a)**

First, we see the timing of the conversation. That is what verse 10 and the first part of verse 11 are about. Paul reminds us that God's conversation with

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<sup>226</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 472.

<sup>227</sup> Eerdman, *Reading Romans*, 105–06.

Rebekah takes place when she had conceived, but before her twin sons were born. Now, who is Rebekah?

- She is the daughter-in-law of Abraham and Sarah.
- Further, she was the wife of Isaac.

The illustration regarding Rebekah's sons is used because it answers anyone who would object to the first illustration. How might someone object to the illustration of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and their two sons?

- They might object that God's promises were intended only through Sarah's womb and that is why Ishmael is disqualified.
- That is why Ishmael is rejected.

So, Paul responds here with twin boys from the womb of one mother—Rebekah. Nothing distinguishes these boys from each other. They have the same father and mother.

So, Paul says, “By one man” (ἐξ ἑνὸς), something that literally could be translated “by one.” The referent must be supplied by translations. It is likely that Paul not only has one man and one woman in mind, but also one act of conception. That is, they were even conceived at the same time! Could they be any more alike?

Well, that is the timing of the conversation that God had with Rebekah. It was when she had conceived twins by one.

- **The essence of the conversation (12)**

That is when we go to the end of the sentence to see the conversation that God had with Rebekah. In verse 12, Paul recalls that God said, “The older shall serve the younger.” Now, this is a citation of the OT, way back in Genesis. Let's turn back there. **Turn to Genesis 25. Let's look at verses 21–24.**

- So, in answer to Isaac's prayer, Rebekah conceives.
- This event takes place approximately 1800 BC.
- Rebekah's pregnancy is so difficult that she inquires of the Lord about what was happening in her womb.
  - Rebekah was not just an insecure, new mother, she was experiencing unusual pain in her pregnancy.
  - Now, her pain is described in a vivid way. Moses says that the “children were struggling within her.”
  - To this point, she does not know that she is having twins! There were no sonograms and ultrasounds available back then!
  - But Rebekah feels twins “struggling” within her.
    - The word “struggled” is a strong word.
    - It means “to crush, smash, or break” in scripture.

- In the book of Judges, this word is used to describe Abimelech's skull being crushed by a large millstone (*cf. Judg 9:53*).
- It is also used in Isaiah of reeds that are broken (*cf. Isa 36:6*).<sup>228</sup>

- These were not normal babies!
- They were tormenting each other in the womb!
- Now, I am sure it was reassuring to Rebekah to hear from God that there were twins and then to hear that they would both be the father of large nations.
  - Yet, Paul only quotes the final part of God's conversation with Rebekah back in Romans.
  - What Paul quotes is that "the older will serve the younger."
  - It is that quote that forms the essence of the conversation that Rebekah has with God.

Paul wants to highlight something here about God—the way that He works. Here we learn that God does not choose to bless on the basis of human expectations or cultural preferences.

- You see, in their culture, everyone knew that the firstborn would be given priority and significance.
- All other children would inherit less and be given less leadership and distinction.
- Yet, God chose not in accordance with human and cultural expectations.
- He did it a different way and He is entirely free to do so as the Sovereign One.
- He can do as he sees fit.

That means that sometimes we will not understand the way that God works. It might go against the way we think or according to our values.

- Sometimes, things will not make sense, but that is fine because 1) we are not God and 2) He has loved us in Jesus.

So, that is the essence of the conversation that Paul wants to highlight. God chose the younger son, Isaac, to hold a more significant role in salvation history and the blessings promised through Abraham.

- **The point of the conversation (11b)**

But there is something else about this ancient conversation that Paul wants to point out. As a matter of fact, he gives the entire middle part of this

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<sup>228</sup> Cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 175.

sentence to it. In the middle of verse 11, Paul makes a significant point. **Let's look there.**

The material between the dashes is a parenthetical comment, but one that is significant and worthy of our focus. Paul makes an important point with it.

The point of this section is to show that God does not choose on the basis of human performance or eligibility. God is utterly free to choose as He sees fit in accordance with his Divine character, unbound by any commitment to human performance or eligibility.

- There is no human reason that you are saved, and your brother or sister is not.
- You have not earned it.
- You did not show God something in the womb that your sibling lacked!
- No, in his great grace, God reached down to save you and that is because He had chosen you.
  - I like a quote Carissa gave me from one of her Bible studies: “The question is not why does not God save everyone. The question is why does God save anyone—especially me. And the answer is mercy.”
  - When we struggle with questions about God’s justice, we probably should reconsider passages about man’s sinfulness.
  - No one deserves to be saved!

But let’s look at the language more closely here. Paul begins by saying that this conversation happened when the twins were still in the womb, before either were born or had done anything good or bad. In that setting, Paul had this conversation with Rebekah that he had chosen one boy to be greater than the other.

And God did it this way for a purpose (*note: “in order that” [ἵνα]*). So, if you asked God, why did you choose between these boys before they were even born and why did you communicate that to Rebekah in advance? He would say, “So that my purpose of election might stand.”

What we find at this point has to do with deep things that God has planned or purposed things to be. The phrase “God’s purpose of election” (ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ) might better be translated “God’s purpose/plan in accordance with election might stand/remain” (*as opposed to “fallen” in 9:6*).

In Luke 22:22 a similar form is found: “the Son of Man is setting out on his road, in accordance with what has been decreed.” There are two relevant parts to that verse—1) setting out on the road and 2) what has been decreed. Jesus actions conformed to what had been decreed.

In our passage, God’s purpose in choosing Jacob conformed to election. God’s plan followed election—God’s choice in eternity past. His plan and purposes grew out of election. To look at the greater context, it is good for us to see that election affects the fulfillment of God’s promises.

This shows that the choices of God, while always righteous and holy, are absolutely sovereign, bound in perfect conformity to his purposes in election.

Next, Paul takes things farther in the final part of verse 11 by saying that all of this is not “because of works, but because of him who calls.” I do not think Paul could be clearer here. God’s purposes are not determined by any human quality, performance, or merit. It is not because of works.

▪ **A confirmation (13) – <sup>13</sup> As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”**

Well, that is the conversation that Paul addresses. It furthers and strengthens what he has been saying about the way that God works with the objects of his promises. Before the twins were even born, God chose Jacob because of no merit of his own.

To this conversation, Paul adds one final confirmation in verse 13. He says, “as” or “just as” “it is written.” The Bible is Paul’s final authority, and it confirms his views of how God chose between these two sons. Now, Paul quotes, Mal 1:2–3—“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Now, I have had the joy of working through Romans in enough settings now that I understand that at this point, sometimes there are a lot of questions! So, let’s go back to that passage and try to look more closely at that! ***Please turn in your Bible to Malachi 1. Let’s read Mal 1:1–5.***

- Well, let’s start by considering the original setting of these verses.
  - The book of Malachi contains the prophetic oracles of the prophet Malachi who ministered among the returned exiles of the people of Israel.
  - Malachi truly is not only the last book in the cannon of the OT, but he lived and ministered later than the other prophets.
    - By the time that Malachi ministers, the people of Jerusalem had already been back in the land after exile for more than 100 years.
    - The city, walls (cf. *Ezra & Nehemiah*), and temple (cf. *Hagai & Zechariah*) had already been rebuilt.
  - Yet, the Israelites were really corrupt. So, Malachi keeps confronting them with a series of nine arguments between God and the people. He presents something true about God and how he has cared for them and then has the people respond with questioning God and his mercies to them (cf. “but you say”).
  - The events found in Malachi’s prophecies occur around 420 BC, approximately 1400 years after Jacob and Esau were born. Within his book, Malachi frontloads the disputes between God and Israel with this one where they question God’s love for them. To show God’s love for the people, he declares that he has indeed loved Jacob—his descendants—and has hated Esau—the people of Edom. God says this is undeniably

true by the fact that Edom lies in ruins and could not even rebuild themselves if they tried. The people of Israel, however, were enjoying a rebuilt civilization. Now, it is the prophetic testimony about how God cared for Jacob and not Esau that Paul calls as final confirmation of God's election of Jacob.

So, let's look now at the actual wording of this challenging passage.

- “**JACOB I LOVED**” (τὸν Ἰακώβ ἠγάπησα) – Not many of us have any difficulty with this phrase. We like the fact that God would love someone. The simple point of the citation here is that God demonstrated love for Jacob and his descendants. I am not going to join in with stubborn Israel of Malachi's day to question that. As a matter of fact, we have already considered many ways that God loved the people of Israel. It is undeniable.
- “**ESAU I HATED**” (τὸν Ἡσαῦ ἐμίσησα) – The much harder expression is that God hated Esau. What does this mean? How could this be? You say, “I thought God loved all people!” To many of us, this sticks in our throat like a bone! Well, there are different ways to understand this. Let me explain two that solid scholars and Christians hold. Either might be right!
  - **First, some believe that while God loved Jacob, he had less love for Esau.** They explain this as “less love” or “dislike” instead of hate. They feel that that translation here is too strong. This may mean that God loved Esau less than Jacob but stops short of saying that God “hates” Esau.
    - One of the better ways of defending this view involves considering two Gospel texts.
      - **Let's start with Luke 14:26–27.** Now, does Jesus actually expect us to physically despise our parents and family? To answer that, let's look at another account of this.
      - **Let's look at Matthew 10:37–38.**
        - Here Matthew summarizes and translates the content of Jesus's sermon in a little different way and might unlock one of the ways hate was to be understood.
        - The point is that we are not actually to hate our mothers and fathers, but that all our other loves should look like hate when compared to the deep love that we have for Jesus.
        - So, God just did not love him in the same electing or salvific ways than he did Jacob.
    - One could also use the Sermon on the Mount to defend this view.
      - **Look Matthew 5:43–45.** Here Jesus deals with a false teaching about the law and calls us to love our enemies because our Father in heaven does. He makes the sun to shine on them and makes it rain on them, so we should love even our enemies.

- In light of all these things, some believe that the word for “hate” does not mean absolute hatred, but something less than love.
  - This is a good view—one that I have held before.
  - Now, however, I lean more toward the second view.
- **Second, others suggest that we need to leave the sense as “hate.”**  
 They suggest that the kind of hatred being described here is not human hatred and quickly say that we must separate this “divine hatred” from all the forms of wicked hatred that we see in our world—all vindictiveness, all bitterness, all bigotry. With God this hatred is “righteous” and “holy”—separate from any sin on his part. Divine hatred then is never sinful!
- It has not been easy or comfortable for me to arrive at this position, but once I arrived there, God’s brought me confidence and joy in the position.
  - Now, what matters most is what the Bible—God’s Word—actually says and which interpretation better explains biblical passages.
  - Now, the way that I have come to this position was, first, to study the word “hate” and how it is used in the Bible.
    - In its 36 occurrences in the NT, for instance, in only one occurrence does it seem to mean something less than hate.
    - Normally, it means to “hate or detest.”
    - In several passages that speak of human hatred, we learn that things like rejection, exclusion, insults, and slander accompany it (*cf. Luke 6:22; 19:14*).
    - Further, in eight other NT texts, “love” and “hate” are used together and, in each case, they are used as stark contrasts, not different shades or tones of love (*cf. Matt 5:43, 6:24; Luke 6:27, 16:13; John 12:25, 15:19; Heb 1:9; 1 John 4:20*).
  - These truths compel me to leave the translation as hate.
    - But how could that be true?
    - Well, for me it helps to remember that Malachi’s later testimony reflects God’s perspective of Esau—the people of Edom—some 1400 years after God spoke to Rebekah about the twins in her womb.
    - In the 1400 years since God spoke of His choice of Jacob, the descendants of Esau had confirmed their wickedness and rebellion against God so that Malachi could describe God’s demeanor toward them as “hate.”
- This fits with the teaching of much of scripture that talks about the righteous anger that God demonstrates toward the wicked.
- Psalm 5:5–6 say, “The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who

speaking lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

- Psalm 11:5 says, “The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.”
  - Psalm 95:10–11 say, “For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”
  - The Scriptures are clear in these places and others like them. God is indignant, he is angry, with sinners—those who reject his Son. The psalmist says, “Kiss the Son, let him be angry, and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled” (2:12).
- This also coheres with how God further describes how he had laid waste the hill countries of Esau and how He would continue to tear down anything that they built because he is continually angry with them.
  - So, God not only hates sin, in some cases at least, he hates sinners too.
- Such a view of God destroys the old saying, “God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.”
  - I will leave you to wrestle with that! I have wrestled all week, so it is your turn.
  - Whatever you do, however, let the text(s) determine what you believe about God—not your mind, not your values, not your expectations.
  - This might be difficult for some people.
- I have found over time in pastoral ministry that especially older people struggle with this (*people over the age of 50 let’s say!*).
  - They have just thought one way about things for so long that they are inflexible to consider something else!
  - For many of them, they would rather maintain their views and be wrong, than change things they deem so significant.
  - They would rather refuse to submit to what God says about themselves, so they can maintain their own way of thinking about things!
  - Do not do that! You must not do that! Instead, submit your view of God to God’s Word not your own!

Now, you might ask—“So what?” “What does it matter?” “Is this just unimportant theological talk?” I am so glad you asked! 😊 Let me give you three quick “so what?”

- Such a view of how God treats sin and sinners not only accurately portrays God, it also has the value of accentuating grace and love. To use the classic

illustration, against the black, dark backdrop of our sinfulness and condemnation under the wrath, anger, and hatred of God, the gospel shines like the perfect diamond—love becomes more accentuated, more heightened, more glorious when compared to the utter condemnation of all humanity.

- Such a view of God and sin and sinners ignites a zeal in our hearts for evangelism. They are not going to be ok! They need salvation.
- Such of view also causes me to hate my own sin. If we truly get this, then we will not be casual regarding our sin. Sure, we are secure in Christ, but God hates sin and sinners! We must see every sin as the evil and wickedness that God opposes!

Paul's final confirmation from Malachi seals it. God undeniably chose Jacob and not Esau. This had become obvious over time, resulting in God hating the Edomites.

Now, you might leave thinking—"I do not know if that is right!" You might ask, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" That is where Paul goes next! So, hold on to next week! In the meanwhile, know this: 1) God may not act according to human expectation or cultural values and 2) God does not choose on the basis of human merit or eligibility.

It has been a joy to work through Romans 9–11 with you. I was reading someone's presentation of these chapters this morning and he said that they contain thirty-seven citations of the OT in thirteen paragraphs. What dense and important paragraphs these are! Well, we have already considered two paragraphs (1–5; 6–13) and today we consider a third (14–18). After his opening in the first paragraph, Paul turns to defend God throughout most of the rest of the chapter. He is faithful; He is righteous; He is free; and He is Sovereign.

The current failure and rejection of the Jewish people is not God's fault. It is their fault and God's intention was never to save every ancient Jewish person anyway. To gain a complete understanding of these things, you must factor in one more important subject that Paul introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph: election—God's choice of only some of Abraham's children.

**b) God is righteous: He is right to show mercy to whomever He desires (14–18).**

That subject, however, always brings questions, even ones related to God's own righteousness.

- **Initial Question and Answer (14)** – <sup>14</sup> *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!*

So, Paul begins this section by considering someone charging God with injustice. ***Let's read about it in the beginning of our passage in verse 14.***

In this section, Paul anticipates an objection that some might have regarding the character or integrity of God in election. They ask: "Is He unjust?" "Is He unrighteous?" "Is He unfair?"

- Paul considers someone who feels that it is unjust of God to deal with people on the basis of his own choice instead of their works.
- That is the nature of the supposed injustice of God toward humanity.

Paul's answer is an emphatic defense of God's righteousness. God is right—always! "God's actions are [never] blameworthy."<sup>229</sup> It is entirely unthinkable for someone to claim that God is unfair.

- **Reasons for Paul's Denial (15–18)**

Now, Paul supports his quick, emphatic denial of God's supposed injustice with two supports—two reasons—in the rest of the paragraph. These two reasons contain additional revelations about God that help us understand Him. These reasons are succinct and progress in the exact same way. Let me show you:

- First, notes that both reasons come in two verses—verses 15–16 and 17–18.
- Second, notice that both reasons start with 'for' and then reference an OT citation (see vv. 15, 17).
- Third, notice also that Paul draws a deduction after the citations in both sections (see "so then" in vv. 16, 18).

These two reasons both relate back to Paul's emphatic rejection of the idea that God is unjust. So, let's start with the first reason in verses 15–16. **Read them.**

- **God is just because He can show mercy to whomever He desires (15–16).**

Paul begins by making a point from the OT that God remains just in election because God can show mercy to whomever He desires. This is a positive defense.

- **Scriptural support (15) –** <sup>15</sup> *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

The argument itself comes from a text in Exodus where Moses recalls God's self-revelation to him. The text is an important one, so let's turn back there. **Please turn to Exodus 33. Read verses 17–23.**

What we find in these verses is the greatest self-revelation of God found anywhere in the Bible before the coming of Jesus.

- Now, in Exodus 32–34 Israel fails in their covenant relationship to God.
- It starts in Exodus 32 when they fail with the golden calf and engage in idolatry and immorality.
- It is so bad that God tells Moses to step to the side so that He can wipe out the whole people and start over.
- Moses responds, however, with intercession not only in chapter 32, but it continues in chapters 33 and 34.

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<sup>229</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 505.

- Initially, God decides to honor his promise to the Israelites regarding the land and says that his angel will accompany them into the land, but He Himself will not go with them because of their stubbornness (33:2–4).
- The people think this is a “disastrous word” and Moses goes back to intercede on their behalf.
- His requests begin with asking God to “show me your ways” (33:13) and end with asking God to “show me your glory” (33:18).
- Ultimately, God decides to go with the people Himself and give them rest (33:14) before finally granting Moses’s request to reveal to him his glory.
- This self-declaration of God is awesome. It is found in Exod 34:6–7. **Read it.**
  - When God decides to reveal himself, he says that He is merciful and gracious, yet also unwilling to clear the guilty, visiting their iniquities upon them and their descendants.
  - Now, Paul is interested in this self-revelation!
  - He actually appeals to a particular part of it that is a preliminary declaration that focuses on God’s freedom to show mercy and grace to whomever He wants.
  - That is part of what it means to be the Sovereign One!

This passage clearly makes the point that as Creator, God has the freedom to dispense mercy and compassion on anyone He so desires—even the disobedient and rebellious people of Israel. If God decides to accompany them into the land, that is his prerogative and choice entirely!

- **Deduction (16)** – <sup>16</sup> *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

From this text then Paul draws out an inference that applies as a principle to all people and situations—“it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” Now, the subject here is implied.

- The ESV provides a supplied subject: “it.”
- But to what does “it” refer?
- While it might refer to God’s mercy or promise or election or salvation, it seems strongest to say that “it” refers to God’s bestowal or giving or mercy.<sup>230</sup>

God’s actual dispensing of mercy does not depend on “human will or exertion, but on God himself.”

- Human ‘willing’ and ‘running’ (*literal translation*) is everything a human can do.
- It includes both one’s “inner desire, purpose, or readiness [and] the actual execution of that desire.”<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical & Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 155.

<sup>231</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 593.

- Likely, the word “running” is used instead of “walking” to speak of the whole range of human action and covers everything up to the intense devotion of the most devout people.<sup>232</sup>
- God does not give mercy on the basis of any action from fallen men and women.
- Instead, God gives mercy only on the basis of one person—Himself.
- God not only gives out mercy according to His own Sovereign purposes.

God’s promises can function in accordance with his election because God can show mercy to whomever He wants. The fact of the matter is ... He is God!

○ **God is just because He can harden whomever He desires (17–18).**

To this positive idea that defends God’s right to show mercy to whomever He desires, Paul adds the flip side. God not only has the right to dispense mercy as He so desires, He also can harden anyone He desires. That is what we find in verses 17–18. **Let’s read them.**

- **Scriptural support (17)** – <sup>17</sup> *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”*

Of course, Paul’s argument comes from Scripture again. This time, however, he has something in mind that God said earlier in Exodus 9. **Let’s turn back there. Read Exod 9:13–17.**

These verses occur within a larger section where God has Moses go repeatedly back to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, demanding that he let God’s people go (*Exodus 7–12*).

- This happens ten times.
- Ten times God demands that the people of Israel be allowed to go out from Egypt and ten times Pharaoh says, “No.”
- This section we normally refer to as the “10 Plagues.”

Now, the text that Paul cites specifically deals with a statement that God made to Pharaoh through Moses while he is forecasting the seventh plague—hail. God specifically informs Pharaoh that it was He who ‘raised up’ Pharaoh. Other texts of scripture remind us that God installs as king or ruler whomever He so desires. Even this is in God’s hand.

Now, the reason or purpose this stubborn Pharaoh was raised up is given later in the citation—so that God’s power might be shown in Pharaoh and God’s name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.

- As a matter of fact, God has made this explicit even before any of the plagues had yet come.

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 55.

- Exod 7:3b–5 says, “<sup>3</sup> Though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, <sup>4</sup> Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgments. <sup>5</sup> The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”
- So, God installed this Pharaoh in the land so that he would stubbornly refuse to obey God over and over again so that God could over and over again display His power to save His people.
  - These have to do with the complex, inter-woven, purposes of God.
  - We have gone down just two levels!
  - God’s purposes go down so deep it would blow away any intellectual among us!
- The plagues showed that God was powerful and sovereign over the whole earth!
  - You see, God’s judgments were not only negative, they showed a positive purpose to help people know more about His power and to make people know about His name!
  - God makes this clear in the first passage that we read about Pharaoh in chapter 9 when God says that by now He could have struck him down and cut him off from the earth (v. 15).
  - Instead, God keeps Pharaoh in power so that plague after plague, He is able to show the whole world his power.
  - So, God often has positive purposes even when evil men and women remain in control.
    - Sometimes, we fail to know that God has positive purposes working in even the most challenging situations.
    - We might see the suffering and sin and judgment and death, but God is helping people see things about who He is at the same time.
    - Part of this relates to God’s longsuffering and kindness so that people will turn to Him and repent!
    - But it is wholly that people would see His power and proclaim His name!
- **Deduction (18)** – <sup>18</sup> *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

Now, from this Old Testament text, Paul draws out one more inference. Paul sees a principle that stands behind the specific example of Pharaoh. Since God acted his way with Pharaoh in Exodus, we can know that God is free not only to show mercy to whomever he desires, but He is free to harden whomever He wills as well. **Read verse 18.**

A quick warning against those who say these things are only about nations and corporate groups, not individuals. This is a common objection. But Paul speaks of individuals all throughout this passage and it seems to me that Paul draws universal principles in verses 16 and 18 that apply to how He treats people.

One of the main questions in this text has to do with God hardening Pharaoh's heart—whether God hardened Pharaoh's heart first or whether God's hardening responds to Pharaoh's prior hardening. This is where great divides begin to occur within the commentators.

Some say that it is obvious that God first hardened Pharaoh's heart and others say that it is obvious that Pharaoh was the first to harden his heart. I can take you to otherwise responsible commentators who boldly claim their views and berate those who see it differently. In response, let's establish a few things from the text here.

- First, I start with something ironic to me! It is ironic that everyone is so concerned with poor, little, helpless Pharaoh. How quick people are to forget the horrific abuse to which he subjected the people of Israel. I heard one preacher this week say that people think that Pharaoh was such “a swell guy.” It probably should not surprise me, but it is ironic when people rise to declare the “human rights” of evil people like this, but I digress!
- Second, and more importantly, we should know that the “harden word group” is used 16 times concerning Pharaoh in Exodus.<sup>233</sup> Let me tell you a few important things about that word in those 16 occasions.
  - This word denotes spiritual insensitivity and inflexibility. It speaks of stubbornness, obstinance, and unresponsiveness.
  - On six occasions, it is unclear who is hardening Pharaoh's heart. It says something like—his heart “was hardened” (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35).
  - Four times Pharaoh hardens his own heart (8:15, 32; 8:34, 35).
  - On seven other occasions, however, the Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10).
- Next, we can see two apparently conflicting truths.
  - Truth 1: The first reference to God's hardening of Pharaoh (9:12) comes after references to Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart (8:15, 32).
  - Truth 2: God twice predicts that he would harden Pharaoh's heart before any of the other occurrences (4:21; 7:3). That is likely why scholars disagree so much! You can make it look either way.
- Finally, however, I find it important to consider a different culprit for the initial hardening of Pharaoh.
  - While some attribute it to God and others Pharaoh, I put the blame on someone else—Adam (& Eve!).
  - ***Do you remember Romans 5?***
    - There we learned that all men and women, boys and girls, are condemned because of Adam's sin and the condemnation that he brought down on all humanity.

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<sup>233</sup> Cf. Exod 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10.

- So, Pharaoh is born hard, spiritually insensitive, dead in trespasses and sins.
- Long before Moses came into Pharaoh's life, he was not a good guy!
- He was already hardened, completely insensitive to sin.
- God then further hardens someone born in depravity, tainted by sin, condemned by it already.

Part of the essential nature of God is His ability to choose apart from any obligation to anything or anyone outside himself. Piper says, "This is the essence of what it means to be God."<sup>234</sup>

- If we refuse God the right to choose, then we refuse God the right to be God.
- In other words, as one man put it: "God's freedom from human 'willing and running' is at the very heart of what it means to be the all-glorious God."<sup>235</sup>
- You see, choosing shows forth the radiance of God-being-God.
- Think about this—try to remove the emotion—these are not choices that we would want to leave to just anyone or, for that matter, any human agency or government!
  - How do you think NATO or the Senate or the House of Representatives would do with these decisions?
  - No, this requires divinity! We are much better off to leave these things with the Eternal & Divine Council—Father, Son, and Spirit.

I think the ancient prophet got it right in the book of Numbers. He said, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind. Does He speak and not act or promise and not fulfill" (Num 23:19)? Let's let God be God! Let's submit to the One on the throne! Maybe you struggle with this! I remember when I submitted to God initially. I was overwhelmed with my sinfulness and His righteousness, and I bowed weeping, next to my bed. Now, over 40 years later, it has been sweet to serve this God. Will you not submit and believe on His Son for salvation? And for all us who believe, let's submit again to what this text says

**c) God is glorious: both his wrath and power reveal the wealth of God's glory (19–23).**

In these verses, Paul continues his defense of God. The current rejection of Israel is not God's fault. Paul's been defending God since verse 6.

- God is reliable, always fulfilling His promises.
- God is also righteous. He always does what is right even when He chooses between individuals.
- He is not unjust because He can show mercy and harden whomever He wills as Creator.

That is, because God is sovereign over all creation and time, things work in conformity to His will. Things do not follow what humans exert or do, but on what God wills.

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<sup>234</sup> Piper, *The Justification of God*, 89.

<sup>235</sup> Piper, *The Justification of God*, 180.

In verses 19–23, Paul defends God against a new accusation that he articulates in verse 19. Paul’s answer to this objection or accusation against God comes in verses 20–23.

- **Accusation (19)** – <sup>19</sup> *You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”*

Let’s start with the accusation in verse 19. **Read it.**

Paul articulates a potential objection to what He’s been saying about God’s freedom and righteousness in the previous verse. The objection comes as two questions, the two questions work together to make one accusation. The questions together wonder how God could hold anyone accountable as a morally responsible being since no one can resist His will.

- If God shows mercy to whomever He wills, and hardens whomever He wills, then how can He judge anyone?
- In other words, if everything is determined by God’s will, in advance, how can He hold human beings responsible?

That is the accusation.

- **Answer (20–23)**

This leads Paul to answer. The answer comes in two ways—through 1) an illustration in verses 20–21 and 2) a direct answer in verses 22–23.

- **Answering through illustration (20–21)** – <sup>20</sup> *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”* <sup>21</sup> *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?*

Let’s start with the illustration. **Look with me at verses 20 and 21.**

Now, most of these two verses are about the illustration of the potter and the clay. Before that, however, Paul calls out an imagined objector!

- In Romans, Paul keeps going after some guy, he calls, “You.”
- He has done this many times in chapters 2 and 3 and now again in chapter 9.
- This objector is one that Paul offers to represent any person who finds problems with what Paul has been saying about God.

In this case, Paul says that this person has gone too far! Do you remember asking your parents questions about going somewhere or doing something?

- You start innocently enough, but then, after not getting what you want, you cross the line and go too far!
- Do you remember the look in your parents’ eyes when you went too far?
- It is normally when you chose to answer back to them and accuse them of being unfair or not having the right to tell you what to do!

Well, in this passage, the objector goes too far. “Well, if God determines to show mercy entirely according to his own Sovereign purposes and choice, then how could he hold anyone responsible?” “God, you do not know what you are doing!”

Now, Paul’s first question, injects the two actual positions of objector and Creator. He calls the objector—“O man” and then reminds him that he’s arguing with “God.” The words “answer back” demonstrates the rebellious spirit of this individual! This is not someone asking sincere questions, this is someone quarrelling with God.<sup>236</sup>

Maybe you remember your brother or sister answering back to your parents? And you were like, “Oh boy.” “Get the popcorn!” “This is going to be fun to watch!”

So, Paul retorts back to the audacious man who backtalks the Creator: “Who are you, O man to answer back to God?” After this retort, Paul gives the illustration of the potter and clay to bring more clarity to God’s freedom as Creator in how he treats human beings. This analogy is quite fitting, when we remember that the original source of human beings is the dirt of the ground.

Now, let me make three important points about this illustration.

- **First, the potter-clay illustration comes originally from the OT.**
  - All through chapter 9, Paul keeps using the OT as grounds for his views about God.
  - This is no exception.
  - The potter-clay illustration comes from Isaiah.
    - As a matter of fact, it seems that Paul’s potter-clay imagery comes from Isaiah’s theology.
    - In several passages, Isaiah uses this analogy to portray how God relates to people (cf. Isa 29:16, 45:9, 64:8).
    - In those original passages, Isaiah is emphasizing God’s rights as Creator, and from those passages, Paul establishes a principle.
    - As Creator God has Creator’ rights!
    - This is an idea with which all Jewish theology of the OT agreed!
    - Consider, for instance, how Job responds to God after being overwhelmed with everything that God had done and is doing in creation. **Read Job 40:1–5.**
      - When in the presence of God in the whirlwind, Job learns it is not the right of the creature to answer back to the Creator.
      - He puts his hand on his mouth and decides to proceed no further.
- **Second, the potter-clay illustration displays the foolishness of humans answering back to God.**

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<sup>236</sup> Stott agrees. He writes, “Paul is not censuring someone who asks sincerely perplexed questions, but rather someone who ‘quarrels’ with God, who talks back or answers back.” Stott, *Romans*, 271.

- In this analogy, Paul has the finished vessel or pot asking the potter, “Why did you make me into this?”
  - The implied answer here is that no pot would ever say that to the potter.
  - The point is that we should not question why God does what He does with humans.
  - God’s rights over human beings can also be seen in the original verb of verse 21.
  - “Has the potter no right?”
    - Of course, the answer is that the potter has all right or authority to do whatever He wants.
    - That is, unless you want to disagree with Paul and his inspired writing here!
    - You can say that the potter does not have any rights over the clay, but you would be disagreeing with God!
- **Finally, a key to the potter-clay illustration is to understand that the lump—the original materials for all vessels—represents sinful humanity.**
- One of the most common ways people object to the potter-clay illustration is to struggle with God only fashioning some vessels for honor.
  - At the heart of this objection can be the assumption that we are talking about innocent human life, innocent human beings.
  - Instead, I think the imagery makes more sense if the clay is all sinful.
  - The clay is polluted.
  - Someone injected poison into the whole lump!
  - The point then is what God does with sinful humanity.
  - It is a metaphor which does not have to explain every single aspect of salvation and salvation history.
  - The point of this specific illustration involves God shaping sinful humanity in whatever ways that he wants.
    - So, if the potter wants to do something with any of it for honorable use, then that is mercy.
    - If the potter rejects any of the rest, then that is just.

Now, having used this illustration to defend God’s rights as Creator, Paul adds an additional thought through posing a question that expects assent. **Look with me at verses 22–23.**

- **Answering through direct answer (22–23) –** <sup>22</sup> *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,* <sup>23</sup> *in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory.*

In verses 22–23, Paul offers a foundational condition or assumption upon which his views rest. He asks, “Well, what if this is true?” Then he never finishes the proposal. He lays the foundational condition or assumptions on us and does not give the consequences because he is most concerned that you see these divine purposes that stand underneath God’s treatment of unbelievers like Pharaoh.

- Last week, we saw times in Exodus when God told Pharaoh that he could have taken him down at any time, but that he was patient with him so that the world would see His power and fear his name.
- I like how Doug Moo describes this: “In the case both of Pharaoh and of the vessels of wrath, God withholds his final judgment so that he can more spectacularly display his glory.”<sup>237</sup>

Now, Paul reveals this more specifically with three purposes God has for being patient with disobedient, stubborn humanity. They are found in verses 22 and 23.

- **To show His wrath** – First, God shows patience toward disobedient, stubborn humanity to highlight his wrath! In this passage, they are called “vessels of wrath,” which means they are “those who will experience divine wrath and destruction.”<sup>238</sup> Listen, the Bible makes no apologies for the wrath of God that comes against those who reject His Son, Jesus. When stubborn people reject God and His Son, they will receive God’s Holy wrath toward sin.
- **To make known His power** – He also does so to display His power to the whole world. Like the situation with Pharaoh, where his hardness gave God opportunity to show His power through ten plagues, bearing in patience with those who oppose God gives Him opportunity after opportunity to display His power in response today.
- **So that we might know the riches of his glory** – Finally, we get to the ultimate purpose of God in showing patience toward disobedient humanity.
  - He does this so that we (cf. v. 24) might know something significant!
    - We are the vessels of mercy, the ones who experience God’s mercy and grace.
    - Along these lines, I love what the psalmist says in the familiar psalm— Psalm 23.
    - In one place he says, “Surely mercy and goodness shall follow me all the days of my life.”
      - The word “follow” means “pursue.” Surely, God’s mercy pursues after me, chases me, all the days of my life.
      - Oh, how great it is to be objects of God’s mercy and compassion.
  - Now, more specifically, God bears patiently with unbelievers so that we might know the wealth of God’s glory.
  - But what does that mean? What are the “riches of God’s glory”?
    - Well, that is the big question!
    - This is one that is hard to really grasp.
    - When Paul says this, he likely means that God desires for believers to know His excellence, how He works, and who He is.

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<sup>237</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 605.

<sup>238</sup> Seifrid, “Romans,” 646.

- In other words, the “riches of God’s glory” speaks of the summary of all His glorious attributes and ways.
- Regarding these riches, Paul says God wants us to know them!
  - Do not make this solely intellectual here!
  - It is that, but it is also experiential.
  - God wants us to know His divine excellence and significance in our soul as well as our mind!
- So, I ask you, “Do you live to know the riches of God’s glory? Do you live to learn more of who God is?”
  - This means that you will continually pursue Him through prayer and study of the Word!
  - May I leave you with one last statement from one preacher?
  - He said, “Those who see the glory of God most, do most for this world. See little of God, do little. See much, do much!”<sup>239</sup>

**d) God is merciful: His plans for the present include many Gentiles and some Jews (24–29).**

In Rom 9:6, Paul begins his argument with a bold statement defending the blamelessness of God in his handling of the Israelite people. He says, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed.” Ever since that, Paul has been defending God against any charges that someone might bring against him.

- More specifically, 1) God is reliable (vv. 6–13), 2) righteous (vv. 14–18), and 3) glorious (vv. 19–23).

Whatever your views of this challenging passage, do not lose sight of the larger argument. God is not to be blamed. No, He is always reliable, righteous, and glorious.

To these three defenses of God, Paul adds a fourth or final defense. This time Paul shows that God is merciful. That is, behind God’s wise sovereign plan is his determination to be merciful to both Jew and Gentile.

In this text, Paul answers someone who might question why so few Jewish people are coming to Christ through his gospel. Do you realize that you can attempt something for God and experience some fruit yet still have some people criticize you for lack of fruit?

- Imagine that you are leading a vacation Bible school, working with children and inviting them to hear about the gospel.
- You stepped up because others would not and as you try to do this for the gospel, you have young people believe in Jesus.
- But then someone criticizes something that you are doing or the lack of results! “Yeah, I know that we have 300 kids coming, but there are only five kindergartners.”

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<sup>239</sup> John Piper, Sermon on Romans 9:23–24.

- Or you agree to lead a women’s Bible study or good news club and you give yourself to it every single week, and then someone questions why only eight or ten people are coming!

Some might have questioned Paul about why so few Jewish people were believing in Jesus, so Paul takes this one last opportunity to get a very important point across—“Whatever you do, do not blame God!”

Now, the way Paul defends God in this passage is to show that God’s plan for the present time has always been that some Jews and many Gentiles would be saved. Now, Paul’s argument involves the point and the proof.

- **The point: both believing Jews *and* Gentiles are the vessels of mercy (24) – <sup>24</sup> *Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?***

We will look first at Paul’s point. Paul makes his point succinctly in verse 24. ***Let’s read it.***

This verse finishes a greater question started in the previous section. Paul’s been considering God’s purposes to show the riches of his glory to vessels of mercy, and this verse identifies these vessels. The vessels of mercy are “us.”

By “us” Paul refers originally to himself and the Roman believers in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile. By extension his point is that we all—the true church; believers in God’s Son, Jesus—are the vessels of mercy.

The greater point is that God’s call includes people from the Jewish nation and the Gentiles.

- **The proof: scriptural support for the inclusion of Jews *and* Gentiles (25–29)**

But could anyone have foreseen that God’s call includes both Jew and Gentile? Could anyone read the OT scriptures and foresee this? Well, that is where Paul goes next. Paul moves from his point about the inclusion of Jew and Gentile to his scriptural support or proof for both.

Now, his proof comes from two ancient writing prophets who spoke of God’s plans and purposes. He refers to the first of the minor prophets, Hosea, and the first of the major prophets, Isaiah. Paul uses texts from Hosea to prove that God’s calling includes Gentiles (vv. 25–26) and passages from Isaiah to prove that God’s calling presently includes Jews as well (vv. 27–29).

- **Proof from Hosea that God’s calling includes Gentiles (25–26) – <sup>25</sup> *As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” <sup>26</sup> “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”***

Let’s look first at what Paul says about Gentiles from Hosea. ***Look with me at verses 25 and 26.***

In this passage, Paul brings together two verses from the ancient book of Hosea—Hos 2:23, 1:10b—so that readers might keep in mind the first two chapters of that amazing book.

- In its original setting, Hosea is talking about the future restoration of the northern tribes of Israel who have been disobedient to God.
- In response to their disobedience, they have been destroyed or in a few cases been deported to Assyria so that they barely even remain a people.
- Yet, Hosea prophesies that God promises 1) to call a ‘not a people’ his people, 2) to call a ‘not beloved people’ his beloved, and 3) to call those who were ‘not a people’ his sons.

Now, some people wonder how Paul could use Hosea’s text about the northern tribes of Israel to talk about the calling of Gentiles.

- The answer is that Paul simply sees a principle or analogy at play here.
- Hosea speaks of outsiders being called into God’s people.
  - In the original context, it was the disobedient Northern tribes.
  - Here Paul applies the principle to the Gentile people.<sup>240</sup>
- John Stott’s famous words about this passage are true in both contexts: “Their inclusion is a marvelous reversal of fortunes by God’s mercy. The outsiders have been welcomed inside, the aliens have become citizens, and the strangers are now beloved members of the family.”<sup>241</sup>

So, could someone read the OT and see that God’s calling includes the Gentiles? Paul’s answer here is “yes!”

- Later, he will use other texts to do this even more explicitly.
- **Read Rom 15:9–12.**
- If you think about it, even back in the Abrahamic promises, we see that “all families of the earth will be blessed” through God’s covenant promises to the forefathers of Israel.

So, in this passage, the ancient prophet Hosea predicted a time when outsiders would be welcomed by God to be His people and sons. Paul uses this powerful, poetic, prophetic text to make the point. **Read verses 25b–26.**

- **Proof from Isaiah that God’s calling includes a portion of the Israelites (27–29)**

But to return to Paul’s defense of God’s integrity in his dealings with the disobedient Jewish people, Paul offers another set of verses—this time from Isaiah—to show that God’s calling also includes a portion of the Israelite people. This time the two verses are introduced and separated. The first Isaiah quote comes in verses 27 and 28 and the second in verse 29.

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<sup>240</sup> Hafemann writes, “Paul detected a principle in these verses that he applied to his day.” Hafemann, *Romans*, 47.

<sup>241</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 274.

- **Only a remnant of Israel is being saved (27–28)** – <sup>27</sup> *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, <sup>28</sup> for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.”*

Let’s look at the first one in verses 27 and 28.

Paul combines a small portion of the Hosea text he has just cited with Isa 10:22–23 in these verses.

- This allows Paul to consider how things have gone with Israel.
- The prophet Isaiah cries out this message with urgency and intensity.
  - The prophetic word of warning moves from the vast number of Israelites that exist to the few that will be saved.
  - It moves from the descendants of Israel like the sand of the sea (*the “constant refrain” of the Abrahamic promises<sup>242</sup>*) to them being only a remnant.
- Now, this is the first time in the book of Romans that the word “remnant” (ὑπόλειμμα) is used.
  - What is a remnant?
  - It is a leftover. It is a small, leftover piece of ... cloth, carpet, etc.
  - It is a fragment leftover.
  - So, the text moves from a large number of ethnic Jews to a small number who are saved.

The reason these things came to be is that God always accomplishes His word thoroughly, effectively, and swiftly on earth!<sup>243</sup>

- **Without God’s intervention the Israelites would be destroyed (29)** – <sup>29</sup> *And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”*

After establishing that only a remnant or portion of the Jewish people will presently be saved, Paul adds one thought through a final quote from Isaiah in verse 29. **Let’s look there.**

Now, this citation comes from the significant, opening oracles of Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah arranged his opening prophetic statements in twin poems in chapter 1 (vv. 2–9; 10–20). This verse comes from the final verse of the first poem.

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<sup>242</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 126.

<sup>243</sup> Schreiner uses some of these words to describe the sureness and swiftness of God’s word. Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 529.

In this original context, had it not been for a few survivors among God's people, they would have been as thoroughly and utterly wicked and destroyed as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- No one except Lot's family survived in those cities.
- So, too with the destruction and captivity of God's people.
- Unless the almighty God had not spared a few, none would have survived the opposing onslaught.

Paul relates this statement about Sodom and Gomorrah to the few, believing Jewish people of our day as well. Although thousands upon thousands of Jewish people exist today, they would all be lost unless God saves a portion of them.

Now, these words that Paul cites from Isaiah are both bad and good news.

- The people of Israel have suffered under the consequences of their sin, but a few—a remnant—are still being converted.
- The primary focus here, however, is likely on the good news.
- There is a ray of hope, some are still being converted.
- That is not because of some attribute in Israel.
- No, that is because God is merciful and faithful to his word and his people.

God never promised to save them all, but he did promise to save some. If he did not intervene, they would have become what became of Sodom & Gomorrah. No one would survive! But God is faithful to save some by their inclusion in the church. Truly and ultimately God has been so merciful and faithful to us in the cross. God did not stop short. He gave up his only Son for us.

So, this is Paul's point and his proof. The church today, both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus, are the vessels of mercy as confirmed by the ancient prophets, Hosea and Isaiah. We are the ones who have experienced the abundance of God's mercy and faithfulness found in the salvation provided by His Son.

#### **b. Who is to blame (9:30–10:21)**

In Rom 9:30, Paul considers the current rejection of Israel from another perspective. He has been saying that the problem was not with God.

- God is righteous and free and sovereign and faithful and merciful.
- The problem is not with him.

Instead, the problem is with Israel.

So, now Paul begins unfolding the three-fold failure of Israel from 9:30–10:21. Israel has failed because 1) they tried to achieve righteousness through works (9:30–33), 2) they did not submit to God's righteousness in Christ (10:1–17), and 3) they willfully disobeyed God's message (10:18–21).

Now, as we begin to look at these texts, we begin with the foundational reasons for Israel failure. In their quest for righteousness, they made a fundamental mistake in their rejection of Jesus, the cornerstone. Paul wants his readers to know what a quest for right standing with God requires.

## 1) Israel failed because they tried to achieve righteousness by works (9:30–33).

So, let's begin. Israel's first reason for failure is listed in verses 30 through 33 in Romans 9. They failed because they tried to achieve righteousness by their own works.

### a) Question (30a) – <sup>30</sup> *What shall we say then?*

This section starts with a question that Paul's used several times in Romans so far. This is the seventh and last time that Paul uses this question in Romans. This question—"what shall we say then?"—allows Paul to turn to a new subject and offer a clear perspective on an important subject. We have heard this question so many times in Romans, we risk repeating this phrase habitually in our own conversations—"What shall we say then?"

### b) Conclusions (30b–33)

This question allows Paul to draw two conclusions in verses 30b–33. If you look at the next words in verse 30 and the first words in verse 31, you can see the way Paul organizes things here. It says, "... that Gentiles" (30b) and "that Israel..." (31).

Paul will draw conclusions first about Gentiles and then about the Jewish people.

- His conclusions about Gentiles take up only half of one verse.
- His conclusions about the Jewish people will take up the rest of the paragraph (verses 31–33), forming the dominant emphasis and point of the passage.

These two statements together were a summary of the situation in the church of Paul's day, and it still holds true in the church today. So, we will get a better understanding of how things actually are when we look at what Paul says here about Gentiles and Jews in the church. Having said that, let's look at his first, brief conclusion about the Gentiles. **Read v. 30b.**

- **About the Gentiles (30b)** – *That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith.*

Gentiles are portrayed in this passage as the ones who have "attained" (καταλαμβάνω) or apprehended righteousness, although they were not "pursuing" (διώκω) or seeking after it.

- The participle "pursuing" speaks of a "quest characterized by zeal and energy, by earnest effort,"<sup>244</sup> but to be clear, the Gentiles were not doing this!
  - The Gentiles did not make any sacrifices to God.
  - They were not taking journeys to the Temple in Jerusalem.
  - They were not obeying the Law, but they received righteousness.
  - **How?** The simple answer is "faith."

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<sup>244</sup> Abernathy, *An Exegetical Guide to Romans 9–16*, 69.

The key for Gentiles who attain righteousness is that they do so by faith. They believe. They look outside of themselves to God and his salvation. This is why “Gentiles outnumber the Jews in the present configuration.”<sup>245</sup>

Do you know that even today the ones we think will never be saved (they show no interest in spiritual things) are often the ones who God saves through Jesus? Do not give up on anyone! God might save that spouse, that relative, that neighbor who is not even seeking right now!

- **About the Jewish people (31–33)**

Well, that brief description of the unsuspecting, but obtaining Gentiles leads Paul to take much longer with the Jewish people. Their situation is the exact opposite. Paul presents their fate in two ways. **Let’s look first at the nature of their fate in verse 31.**

- **The nature of Israel’s fate (31)** – <sup>31</sup> *But that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.*

Unlike the Gentiles, the Jewish people were pursuing or seeking after something with diligence.

- They were pursuing or seeking after the law.
- They had a great zeal for the law of Moses and felt that it would result in righteousness for them.
- Literally, they were pursuing a law “for righteousness” or “for right standing with God.”

Although they were pursuing God’s law for right standing with God, they did not succeed.

- They failed in getting it.

That should lead us to some important questions. Is it wrong to pursue the law? Well, the answer has to be “no” according to the OT. Then what is the issue here?

- The issue is not the law; it is holy, righteous, and good.
- The issue is the way the Israelites pursued it and that is where Paul goes next in the passage.

- **The reasons for Israel’s fate (32–33)** – <sup>32</sup> *Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,* <sup>33</sup> *as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.*

In verses 32 and 33, Paul gives the reasons for Israel’s current situation. **Let’s look there.**

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<sup>245</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 477.

In these final two verses, Paul gives two reasons Israel has failed in their pursuit of righteousness. They have failed because ...

- **They did not pursue it through faith (32a).**

The problem for Israel was not so much the object of their pursuit, but the way in which they sought after it. Had they sought after the law “in faith” instead of “on the basis of” works, they would have found righteousness. The key then is “faith” not “works.” No one will be saved through works of the law.

Seeking righteousness through faith would require them to admit that the law condemns them and that they need to be saved. People do not want to admit this! They want to make something out of their own works! They want to highlight it like a diamond and give it the prominent place, but the text continues by showing another mistake that they make.

- **They have stumbled over the stumbling stone (32b–33).**

They reject what is to have the prominent place. In verses 32b–33, we learn that they have failed not only because they did not pursue the law through faith, but because they have stumbled over the stumbling stone. What a good morning to study this passage about stumbling! Right? If you would have seen me at 5am, which feels like 4am this morning, you would have been able to visualize this metaphor quite well! ***Let’s read this again.***

This text has God laying a very important stone in Zion—the city of Jerusalem. Let’s consider three significant things about this.

- **First, Paul quotes from two significant stone texts to make this point.**

The actual citation looks something like this: <sup>33</sup>As it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone (*Isa 28:16a*) ‘of stumbling, and a rock of offense;’ (*Isa 8:14*) ‘and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’” (*Isa 28:16b*).

To make this quotation, Paul weaves together two texts from Isaiah that describe a stone that people either reject or believe in. He inserts a part of Isaiah 8 right into the middle of his quote.

At this point, however, we need to consider that there was an established, significant theme in Christianity regarding “stone texts.”

- This tradition can be seen in ten texts, three in the OT and seven in the NT.
- Let me talk through these with you briefly.
  - I will put them all on the PowerPoint for you.
  - I would encourage you to write out these references and study them more closely this week.

- As we begin, we notice that there are three stone texts in the OT—one in the Psalms and the other two in Isaiah. In the psalms and prophets, much of the language is poetic. In Hebrew poetry, the authors use metaphors or pictures to stun in vivid, memorable ways. So, these texts use the image of a stone, a cornerstone, to make a point. The cornerstone is the principal stone of a building, usually placed at the corner of the building, to guide all future development in the building. It was normally one of the largest and most prominent stones. Everything was aligned to it.
  - Psalms 118 – Let's begin by looking at the Psalms text. **Read verses 22 and 23.** The stone is rejected, but then it becomes the cornerstone.
  - Isaiah 8 – **Read verses 13–15.** Yahweh will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and rock of stumbling. Both the people of Judah and Israel will stumble over the stone and will be broken and ensnared and seized.
  - Isaiah 28 – Twenty chapters later, in the Woe Oracles, Isaiah picks up this stone theme again, this time in a more positive way. **Read verse 16.** If anyone believes in this stone that Yahweh lays, they will find lasting refuge. Of special note here is that Yahweh speaks to the stone. He is not speaking to himself. The stone is something other than Yahweh.
- ***This stone tradition is picked up in the NT by three people in seven places.***
  - First, Jesus picks it up. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus quotes this tradition to make a point about himself. He gives the parable of a man who sent his own son to the tenants of a land but then the tenants kill the son. Jesus uses this parable to claim that this is what the pharisees are doing with God's Son. **Read the Matthew passage.** Jesus is then key for us. He says He is the stone, the cornerstone!
  - Then Peter uses it. **Read Acts 4 and then 1 Peter 2.** Peter learned from Jesus that Jesus himself was the stone.
  - And that is how Paul uses it too. **Read Ephesians 2 and Romans 9.**

- **So, second, the stone is Jesus.**

Because of Paul's high view of the deity of Christ, he quotes these texts about Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is the stone!

- **Third, what someone does with Jesus determines their destiny.**

So, Israel's present rejection and failures have to do with what they have done with Jesus. That is where we observe our third significant lesson regarding this quote. Third, what someone does with the stone—Jesus—determines his or her destiny.

This is likely why Paul merges the two citations together. Neither text by itself could make the dual point that what we do with Jesus either condemns or saves us. Let's look more closely at what the text says about these two ways the stone impacts people.

- **First, the one who rejects the stone stumbles and is offended.**

The problem with the Jewish people is that they have rejected the one that the law and the OT pointed forward to. They have rejected the stone that God has laid. The stone—his Son, the future Messiah—was the one who was to be the cornerstone! It was the one on whom the whole program was built. The whole program pointed to this one person, Jesus, the stone.

Yet, the Israelite people were hoping to secure a righteousness on their own. So, they trip over the scandal of Jesus and take offence at the righteousness that he offered.

- **Second, the one who believes in the stone will not be put to shame.**

For some others, however, among the nations, who put their faith in this stone laid by God, they will not be disillusioned or disappointed. They will not bear any shame because the stone bore their shame for them. There is no way that they will be disappointed.

So, what will you do with this cornerstone today? Will you build your life on him by believing or will you stumble over him to your eternal destruction?

## **2) Israel failed because they did not submit to God's righteousness in Christ (10:1–13).**

In Romans 9–10, Paul deals with the lack of Jewish converts to the gospel that he proclaims. The problem is not with God.

- He is perfectly righteous, faithful, sovereign, and merciful.

The problem is the Israelite people's. Paul talks about their failure in different ways at the end of Romans 9 and through all of Romans 10.

- Last week, we saw that they fail because they try to gain right standing with God on the basis of their own works.
  - They want to make something out of the quality and character of their own righteousness.
    - They treat their own works as a precious diamond that they want to feature!
  - Instead, Paul shows that God established something different as the proper foundation, a cornerstone.
    - The chief cornerstone is Jesus, yet most Jews stumble over him.

- Rom 9:32b says, “They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.”
- So, Paul shows that Jesus will either be your precious cornerstone or your stumbling stone.
- This still holds true today!
- Even today, instead of believing in him and building their faith on him, many people reject Jesus and try to build on the sands of their own works.
  - They will not receive salvation in the future judgment.
  - They will be put to shame.
- Today, we will consider another way Paul sees their problem—Israel fails because they do not submit to God’s righteousness.

Now, Paul reveals Israel’s failure by uncovering his desires and prayers for them. Paul wants the Roman believers to learn from his prayers. We can too! All around us are people who fail to submit to God as well. So, we will consider two things about his prayers today.

We will see the content of (v. 1) and reasons for (vv. 2–4) Paul’s prayer.

**a) The content of Paul’s prayer—the salvation of Jewish people (10:1) – <sup>1</sup> Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.**

Let’s begin with the content of Paul’s prayer. ***Look with me at verse 1.***

Having just considered how the Jewish people stumble over the cornerstone to their own destruction, Paul now portrays his earnest love for them.

- John Stott writes, “Paul begins this chapter, as he began the last, with a very personal reference to his love and longing for them.”<sup>246</sup>
- In this way, Paul’s tears join with Jesus’s weeping over Jerusalem (*cf. Luke 19:41*) and the stubborn people of Israel who failed to believe in him.

Now, I want you to notice something specifically here about Paul’s concern. It is literally “for salvation” (εἰς σωτηρίαν).

- The ESV translates it with a verb—“that they may be saved,” but a literal translation interprets this with a noun.
- The NAS is much better here: “my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.”
- The content of Paul’s prayers was Israel’s salvation.
- That is what was on his mind and in his prayers.
- Now, in Rom 1:16–17, we learned that salvation is deliverance from the wrath of God against sin.
- Paul knew that every, sinful human being faces God’s holy and heated wrath and judgment.
- So, he prays that God will intervene and bring salvation to his Jewish fellows.

And he keeps praying for their salvation. This is a theme of his writing throughout Romans 10 (see vv. 9b, 10b, 13b).

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<sup>246</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 279.

Learning from Paul, we should examine ourselves.

- Who do you pray for?
- Who do you continually go to God for, praying for their salvation?
  - You should pray regularly for people.
- Who is on your list?
- Do you have a list?
  - Could you say: “My desire and prayer for him or her or them is for their salvation?”
    - You see, “When we care, we pray.”
    - These two—heart desire and prayer—go together.
    - When you are missing one—the other is also missing.
    - When you say you care but you do not pray, then you do not really care too much at all. Do you?

**b) The reasons for Paul’s prayer (10:2–13)**

So, that is the content of his prayers. Next, we learn the reasons for his prayers for the salvation of the Israelite people. We can tell that what follows are reasons because of the very first word of verse 2—“for” (γάρ)—and the first word again in verse 3. These two words mark out two reasons for Paul’s prayer. “For” could also be translated “because.” Paul prays so much for his countrymen because he knows two things about them.

Have you ever observed something about someone that led you to pray for them? Maybe something about them that was a blind spot? Well, that is what Paul does.

Now, he actually affirms two things about them that will guide the rest of our focus this morning.

- **Reason #1: Misinformed zeal (2) – <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**

The first reason Paul prays for Israel’s salvation is found in verse 2. **Let’s look there.**

The first reason Paul prayed earnestly for their salvation was that they had misinformed zeal.

- Now, Paul actually starts out verse 2 on a positive note.
- He affirms the Jewish people’s zeal for God.
- As a matter of fact, the marks and scars on his body from the beatings and whippings and stonings testified to the zeal of the Jews in their defense of Judaism.
- Now, zeal *was* normally a commendable thing when the object was God, and such zeal was the frequent object of the prophets’ sermons and appeals.

But Paul adds this eerie note when he says that it was “not according to knowledge.”

- You see, Paul knew that misplaced or misinformed zeal was not enough.

- For many in our culture, that would be enough!
- But scripture is clear that people must come to God on his terms and respond in ways that comply to His Word.

So, as Paul looks around and discusses God's righteousness with the Jewish people, he observes that there is *a disastrous flaw in the zeal* of the Jewish people. Since they've rejected the cornerstone Jesus, their zeal or passion is not according to knowledge. They have zeal but it is not matched with understanding.

And, of course, Paul himself knew all about this zeal without knowledge.

- In multiple texts, Paul describes his own life before he believed in the gospel of Jesus.
- ***Read Gal 1:13–14 and Acts 22:3–5.***
- Paul was more zealous than any around him.
- His entire life's focus was fueled by zeal for Yahweh and his Torah, but that was not enough!

The point of this passage is so sad. Do you realize that people can have a zeal for God and still be lost in their trespasses and sins? Being sincere in misguided beliefs is not enough.

- Consider those who practice orthodox Judaism today! We lived near a suburb in Minneapolis ("St. Louis Park") that was predominant Jewish. You could drive down the streets of that town on days of feasts and festivals and see them faithfully wearing their traditional garments and following their orthodox worship practices in their synagogues, but unless they believe in the Messiah Jesus, they are under the wrath of God.
- We could examine the daily prayer rituals and chants and the deep asceticism and stunning devotion of people within Islam or Buddhism and find great zeal, but unless they believe in Jesus alone, they will not be saved.
  - I was talking with my barber this week.
  - She is a Buddhist who goes to a unity church where she is told by a *Christian* minister that God will accept her devotion even though she does not believe Jesus is God's Son and died for her sin.
  - Sadly, such a false teacher gives assurances in our pluralistic world that the apostle Paul would condemn.

No. Being sincere in misguided beliefs is not enough! We should honestly evaluate the values of our day. Our culture preaches tolerance and pluralism, but the Bible preaches exclusiveness.

- **Reason #2: Unwillingness to submit (3–13)**

But there was another reason for Paul's prayer for Israel's salvation. This second reason actually is what verses 3–13 are about. Having said that, we will just look at what Paul says about it in verses 3–4 today. ***Let's read those verses.***

- **Problem stated (3–4)**

The second reason for Paul's prayers for Israel's salvation is their unwillingness to submit to God.

- **Their refusal (3b–4)** – <sup>3</sup> *For ... they did not submit to God's righteousness.* <sup>4</sup> *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

That reason comes out clear in the main part of the sentence in verse 3 that appears near the end of the verse. Now, the main idea in this sentence involves the common word used in the NT to speak of submitting to or subjecting to something.

- When this verb is used there is normally some sort of authority—government, God, Torah (e.g. *Rom 8:7, 20; 13:1*)—that demands the proper response.
- To these authorities, people must submit.

In this passage, Paul says that the Jewish people refused to bring themselves under God's righteousness.

- Now, we have already considered God's righteousness in Romans, so let's briefly review what this means.
- This language is used eight times in the book.
- In Romans, we have talked about God's righteousness involving both who He is and how he judges.
  - God is perfectly just and right.
  - He is never wrong or sinful.
  - But he also judges rightly, always.
  - So, God is righteous when he judges sins, but God is also righteous in how he justly justifies the unjust.
  - That is, God's righteousness can also speak of the way He justly brings people to salvation through His Son, Jesus.

That is likely how Paul uses it here. Paul prays for the Jewish people because they refuse to submit to way that God designed to bring people into a right relationship with him. They will not subject themselves to God's righteousness.

Now, we know that Paul speaks of the way that God makes people right in Christ by what he adds in verse 4. **Read it.**

We know that they are rejecting God's righteousness because in it Christ brings an end to the law for those who believe in Jesus. When Israel chose not to submit themselves to Jesus, they failed to see how Jesus brought an end to the law.

Now, this expression is important, but difficult. What does Paul mean when he says that "Christ is the end of the law?" Different proposals have been given for what the word "end" means. This might speak of the "goal" (*purpose, end*) or "termination" (*cessation*) of the law.

- Looking over all the evidence, it seems that Paul is saying that in Jesus the whole law comes to its goal.

- In the last passage, Paul spoke of the Jewish people pursuing something, so the analogy might be a race.
- The Jews were trying to reach the finish line—the goal
- Here he speaks of the law reaching its goal or end in Christ.
- Think about this: the whole law was pointing to the Christ—the Messiah—and the Jews missed it.
- The law comes to its culmination or end in Jesus.
- The end of the law is “Christ for righteousness” for everyone who believes.
  - The first half of this book points forward to Jesus!
  - He is God’s means of attaining right standing with God.
- **Causes of their refusal (3a) – *Being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own ...***

But there is more to explore at the beginning of verse 3. We have not considered the first two phrases in our English translations yet. We know that Israel’s problem is a refusal to submit to God’s saving righteousness found in Jesus, but in these two phrases Paul uncovers causes of their refusal. Why do they not submit?

- **They were ignorant of God’s righteousness.**

First, they do not submit because, they are ignorant of God’s righteousness. We have already seen that their zeal was misinformed, but here we see that they were not aware of God’s righteousness. They were ignorant.

Now, ignorance might be a reason or explanation of their failure, but it is never a justification for it. Now, how contrary this is again to current, popular opinion. We feel that if someone has not known any better that they should not be held responsible for their actions. The Bible, however, contradicts that many times. Here ignorance is a cause and in no way justifies the Jewish people’s rejection of Jesus.

- **They sought to establish their own righteousness.**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> cause is for their refusal to submit to God’s righteousness is their desire to establish their own righteousness. Regarding this, Frank Thielman writes, “The adjective ‘own’ emphasizes what belongs to one’s self ... and highlights Israel’s tragic pursuit of its own way to righteousness via the law rather than God’s way of righteousness, via faith.”<sup>247</sup> As we said last week, they wanted to feature their own works instead of trusting Christ’s work for them.

So, partly because they were ignorant and partly because they wanted to feature their own works, they refused to submit to God’s way of making people right with him.

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<sup>247</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 488.

As we close, do you know this lack of submission to God's way is true of your fellow countrymen as well? This is true of your neighbor—your friend—your co-worker. Do you pray? Do you have a heart's desire for them? Maybe they are ignorant... maybe they are not submissive. Will you not pray for them?

○ **Problem solved (5–13)**

At the beginning of Romans 10, we discovered that Paul had a deep love for the Jewish people. Rom 10:1 says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved." He longs for them to be saved and that runs the whole way through the rest of the chapter!

But Israel refused to submit to God's righteousness found in Jesus.

- They wanted to trust in their own righteousness and so they rejected what was the entire goal of the law.
- Jesus was the goal of the whole law.
- The law pointed to him!
- They stumbled over the cornerstone that God laid—the One upon whom God built everything!

Now, it would be reasonable to wonder why it would be helpful or necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans to spend so much time considering Israel. Why? What could we possibly learn? Well, today, we will see how this ancient message relates to every person here today.

In verses 5 through 13, Paul implores the Jewish people not to make such a devastating mistake of rejecting Jesus and then he tenderly and clearly points the way for them to be forgiven.

So, we are not going to answer every question that you might have about this passage as it is in some ways very complex.

- In this one paragraph, Paul refers to the OT seven times, proving his beliefs from five books—*Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*, *Psalms*, *Isaiah*, and *Joel*.
- If we were taking a seminary class, we would go back to every one of these places to show more thoroughly what Paul is doing.

Today, however, we will stick primarily with this passage in Romans so that we can get a sense for his argument.

▪ **The call to believe the gospel (5–13)**

In this passage, Paul explores two ways of gaining or getting righteousness. The key to this whole passage is Paul's obvious consideration of gaining "righteousness ... based on the law" (v. 5) or "based on faith" (v. 6). In this paragraph, Paul is going to argue that God's only way for people to be made right with him is Jesus. He will argue this negatively and positively.

- **By the law (5)** – <sup>5</sup> *For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.*

He starts negatively with the law in verse 5. **Let's read that.**

In this passage, Paul briefly considers how the law relates to being made right with God. He starts by attributing this idea to Moses and then talks about “the commandments”—both clear references to the law of Moses.

While some debate revolves around this verse, including in some cases whole dissertations being written about the second half of this one verse, the simplest interpretation of it is that one way to life is obedience to the law of Moses. “This is also how Paul understood the sentence when he quoted it in Galatians 3:12.”<sup>248</sup>

In this way of looking at it, “shall live” (ζήσεται) refers to eternal life. So, Paul here briefly considers the hypothetical offer of life through obeying the commandments.

The problem with that understanding, however, is that other scriptures make it clear that no one can achieve it. Earlier in Romans, for instance, Paul said this: “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (3:28).

Another text reveals why the law cannot help us. In James we find this: “If we fail in one point, we are guilty of it all” (2:10). As John Stott says, “The weakness of the law is our own weakness (8:3). Because we disobey it, instead of bringing us life, it brings us under its curse.”<sup>249</sup> You see, “doing” the commandments requires perfect obedience to them all! Even one sin against God’s law makes us guilty of breaking them all!

Yet, we have such a light doctrine of sin and offence in the world today!

- We do not think sin is heavy, ugly, damning.
- We think sin is just a minor problem that we can fix with a band aide.
- We think we can overcome it by self-improvement.
- Further, in our own culture, we exalt sin, sometimes making it as visible and celebrated as we can!
- But “one sin” is heavy. One sin is ugly. One sin is damning.
- If we have a deep and heavy view of human sinfulness, then we know that we need deep grace, supernatural grace to help us!

So, to properly understand verse 5, you must realize that eternal life comes to the one who perfectly “does” what the commandments require. Yet no one can do that! So let me say it as clearly as I can: “No one will be made right with God because of how he or she lives.” No one!

- **By faith (6–13)**

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<sup>248</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 282.

<sup>249</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 282.

The rest of the passage, however, is Paul's positive reinforcement of the idea that righteousness only comes through faith in Jesus. Now, the way that Paul makes this point reveals his tender heart for the condition of his readers.

- **The accessibility of being saved on the basis of faith (6–10)**

He starts by describing how accessible being saved by faith is. The way he does this, however, can initially be a little confusing.

Let me give you another key for getting his point. In this passage, Paul makes an imaginary person. The person is someone he calls “righteousness based on faith.” That is, he personifies “righteousness based on faith” and has him speaking to us. More specifically, he describes what “righteousness based on faith” does and does not say. Look at the beginning of verses 6 and 8.

- **What it does not say (6–7)** – <sup>6</sup> *But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart’ (Deut 9:4), Who will ascend into heaven’ (Deut 30:12)?” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> Or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

Let's start with what he does not say. **Look with me at verses 6 & 7.**

Now, this is the hardest part of Paul's argument. I have enjoyed long talks with a good friend of mine who has spent a long time in Romans, including writing on this passage for his dissertation. We are related and we also worked on our degrees together in Australia. From thinking about those conversations, I have come to realize some important things about these verses that I will share with you now.

First, Paul himself knows this passage is difficult.

- Righteousness based on faith does not say in his heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” or “Who will descend into the abyss?”
- What in the world does Paul mean?
- I mean, “Who says this?”
  - I am sure some of you woke up this morning and said, “You know, I really want to go up into heaven today or I really want to descend down into a pit today.”
  - No, what is not something we normally say or think. So, what is this?

Well, Paul clarifies with these two little statements—“that is” (τοῦτ' ἔστιν). **Do you see those?**

- In my Bible, they are in parentheses at the end of verse 6 and the end of verse 7.

- Those little expressions mean something like: “This is what I mean.”

So, righteousness based on faith does not say, “Who will ascend into heaven? What I mean is, ‘Who will bring Christ down from heaven?’”

- Now, why should we not be saying that?
- Why should we not be thinking, “I am going to go up into heaven and bring Christ down here.”
  - Well, Paul likely has two answers in mind.
  - First, we should not be saying that because we cannot do that!
    - We cannot go into heaven, get Jesus, and bring him down.
  - But we also shouldn’t be saying this because it is not necessary.
  - Why?
    - Because God already did it!
    - He already sent His Son down from heaven at the incarnation.
    - Get it? We should not say or think this because 1) we cannot and 2) we do not need to.
    - Remember those answers for verse 7.

But what else does righteousness based on faith forbid us from saying? Well, in verse 7, it is: “Who will descend into the abyss?” By this, Paul is talking about bringing Christ up from the place of the dead.

- By “abyss” (ἄβυσσος) in this passage, Paul means simply the place of the dead.
- This rare word is used in Revelation of the place from where the beast arises.
- Now, why should we not be saying that?
- Why should we not be thinking, “I am going to bring Christ back up from the dead today?”
  - Well, there are two reasons.
  - First, we cannot do that!
  - We do not have the ability to raise him from the dead! It’s impossible for us.
  - Secondly, however, it is simply not necessary.
  - Why do we not need to do this?
    - Well, you do not need to because God already did it!

- **What it says (8–10)** – <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? “*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*” (Deut 30:14) (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Well, that is what faith based on righteousness will not say. It will not say, “I will do it.” Why? Because “we” cannot and because God already did it! No such journey for righteousness is possible or necessary for us. Instead, the solution is something simpler.

Let’s continue then in verse 8 with what righteousness based on faith says. **Look there!**

Since Jesus has already come down from heaven and up from the grave, what we need is believing, not doing. You see, people have what they need right in front of them. That is what Paul means when he says that it is near you!

- It is like “the righteousness based on faith” guy says, “It is right in front of you. Reach it. Grab it. Take it.”
- This Righteousness based on faith guy sounds so much like Paul.
  - Paul’s been pleading, weeping, praying for his Jewish friends to open up themselves to Jesus.
  - But Romans has historically had an amazing effect on its readers because when we read Paul pulling, tugging on his Jewish friends, it begins to pull on us too.
  - What we feel in Israel’s rejection of Jesus and its submission of their own way pings our conscience too.
  - What we see on the stage in the drama is an ancient man pleading with ancient people but then it starts working on all of us who want to be accepted for doing not believing!
    - It is like watching a movie that ends with a gripping scene where someone dies or two people finally reconcile and the next thing you know you are crying.
    - You’re crying because it reminds you of your friendship or your mother or father.
    - In the characters, you see your own experience.

Is God using this ancient book to pull on your heart this morning? There is only one solution to this problem, and it is Jesus Christ crucified and risen! There is a dividing line! On which side will you stand? Doing—trusting in your own works—or believing—trusting in what Jesus has done for you?

- So, in this passage, we see Paul’s intense and earnest desire for his people to believe.

- The word that they need to say is something that will come out their mouth from their heart.
- More specifically, one must confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord (*Sovereign, God*) and believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead to be saved.

The combination of verbal confession and heartfelt conviction is important to see what genuine faith in Jesus looks like. You cannot just say some magic words, you have to believe them in your heart!

It is also significant to see that it is the resurrection that someone must believe. That reveals that belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is the decisive, distinctive basis of salvation! In other words, you will not be a genuine Christian unless you believe this!

Perhaps, you have been on a quest—a journey—to find peace and fulfillment!

- You have explored all sorts of things.
- You have experimented with pleasures!
- Yet true joy and peace will only come as you find forgiveness by God.

And the good news is you do not have to ascend the highest mountain or descend into the darkest regions to find it.

- No, it is more accessible to you than that!
- Jesus is right in front of you!
  - He has already done it.
- You have a heart, and you have a mouth! Right?
  - Anyone here missing one of those?
  - Good.
  - That would be awkward!
- All you must do is use your mouth and heart to confess that he is Lord and believe that He rose from the dead! If you do that, you will join the millions and millions of genuine Christians throughout time who have experienced forgiveness and salvation.

God wants you to see that salvation is possible, it is available, it is accessible to you if you believe.

- **The support for being saved on the basis of faith (11–13)**

Now, to show that Paul's thinking is thoroughly biblical and justifiable, he offers support for belief and confession at the very end of this passage. That is, he uses two prophetic texts from the OT to prove that God's Word is on his side. ***Let's read verses 11–13.***

- **Scriptural support for belief (11)** – <sup>11</sup> *For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” (Isa 28:16).*

The support for faith comes in verse 11.

- Every single person who chooses to believe “in him” (*not just generally in God, but in Jesus*) will not be put to shame.
  - The word “everyone” could also be translated “whoever.”
  - While both are true, the point might be to emphasize here that every person—any person—who believes “in him” will be delivered.
  - “‘Put to shame’ is a euphemism for being found guilty at the final judgment.”<sup>250</sup>
  - This means that believers will be vindicated and delivered in the final judgment.
- **Scriptural support for confession (12–13)** – <sup>12</sup> *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32).*

And then, in verse 13, Paul quotes from the prophet Joel to describe what happens to any person, regardless of race or ethnicity, if he or she “calls on” Jesus with their mouth. Do you see that?

That is the point of verses 12 and 13 and the two-fold repetition of the words “call on.”

- Back in Joel, the prophet implored the people to call on the name of the Lord—God—to deliver them.
- In this passage, Paul applies calling on “the name of the Lord” to Jesus.
- Universally, inclusively, then, anyone—any person—who calls on Jesus’s name will be saved.

He is Lord of all! He bestows his riches on every person who calls on his name! Will you do that today? Will you call on “the name of *the* Lord” to be saved?

Perhaps, many have already done that, and you have tasted already the grace of God that is available because Jesus died and was raised for you! You sing, “Just as I am without one plead, but that your blood was shed for me!”

May we all rejoice today in our victorious and risen Savior! May we believe and confess that he is our Lord!

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<sup>250</sup> Yarbrough, *Romans*, 158.

### 3) Israel failed because they willfully disobeyed the message from God (10:14–21).

At the end of Romans 10, Paul offers final comments on how his Jewish contemporaries relate to the salvation that is offered in the gospel that he preaches. Yet we considered last week how the theatre of Paul and the ancient Jews draws us in.

- That is, as we see Paul pleading for the Jewish people (*listen to the “Righteousness Based on Faith” guy; you do not have to go up to heaven, you do not need to bring Christ up from the dead; it is already happened; the word is near you*) to believe and call on Jesus, it has the effect of reminding us of our own relationship with God.
- That will be the case one more time as we look at the last part of chapter 10.

Now, we have considered how Paul might explain or defend the fact that so few Jewish people believe his message, but now he explicitly answers that question.

To make his point, Paul begins generally with the necessary conditions for salvation (14–15a) before getting more specifically to the situation of the Israelite people (15b–21). In the process, we will learn more about Israel (vv. 14–17) and about Israel’s unbelief (vv. 18–21).

#### a) More about Israel: they’ve heard but they do not believe (14–17).

The lessons about Israel start with ...

- **Necessary conditions (14–15a)** – <sup>14</sup> **How** then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And **how** are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And **how** are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And **how** are they to preach unless they are sent?

Paul uncovers the conditions necessary for salvation in four—“how”—questions. Do you see them in verses 14 and 15? **Let’s read these four questions.**

The first question repeats the necessary conditions that Paul made in the previous passage. Do you remember verse 9? “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This verse makes it clear that both believing (πιστεύσης) and calling (ὁμολογήσης) on the Lord are necessary. Here Paul considers the logical order of the two. Calling upon the name of the Lord follows believing in him.

To this, Paul adds other, more preliminary conditions. No one can believe on Jesus if they have never heard of him, and they cannot hear about him unless someone preaches. Now, I want to draw a few important lessons here:

- **First, it is expressions like this one that fuel missionary impulse.**
  - This passage makes it clear that no one can believe in Jesus unless they hear someone proclaiming him.
  - In other words, people must hear the gospel to be saved.
  - It is not enough for anyone to believe in God; they must hear about Jesus.
  - There are people all around the world who have never heard!

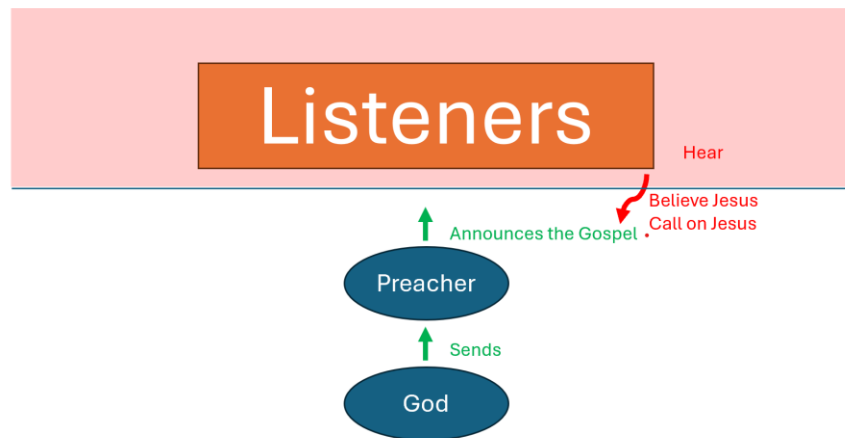
- It is a unique privilege to serve on staff with pastors who all studied with me at Northland Baptist Bible College.
- If you have not noticed that yet, you will eventually!
  - I took classes with Dan and James.
  - I served on faculty with Ben.
  - I taught Thomas.
- The school enjoyed a close-knit community—you had to be close for survival!
- Among the many friends I made there are numbers of men and women who decided to go where the gospel isn't.
  - Ben & Betsy got married, had children, and took their family to Muslim-dominated Turkey.
  - Tim went to Turkmenistan.
  - Seth & Darla went to the Democratic Republic of Congo because some have never heard the word of Christ.
  - Dan & Karis went too, only to come back to invest in you and to encourage you to go—to be a loud voice for the needs of the world!
  - I remember my friend, Jeremy, who took his wife and many children to Cambodia.
    - In the 90's and early 2000's there was a groundswell for missions there.
    - Young men and women were lining up to go to the mission field!
  - Now, I have heard recently of group of believers in an African country where their pastor and church were planning on sending 500 believers into an area where every single one of them would be in jeopardy of death.
    - Someone objected to the pastor, "What are you doing? Why would you send people into that area?" "That might be suicidal."
    - His answer: "This is an issue more important than death. People there have never heard the name of Jesus."
- We grow so complacent and comfortable with what we have here with so little thought for the world, but we must send and go to every town and village—to take the gospel to the ends of the earth for some have never heard. If you get on a plane and fly east or south or north, you would find some who have never heard Jesus's name! Do not let the water or our borders keep you from going!
- **Second, remember the significance of oral witness in a culture where few could read.**
  - Spoken communication was even more valuable in their day.

- James Dunn writes, “The chief means of mass communication was oral; communication of the gospel by written means is not yet envisaged.”<sup>251</sup>
- The primary way the gospel went out in the early church was through spoken words—formal preaching and person witness.

Finally, Paul says that preachers will not proclaim the gospel unless they are sent.

- When Paul adds this condition, he uses the verb form of a word that is used of apostles.
- They are sent ones and here Paul likely reveals that he is speaking of himself and other apostles who were the first preachers of the gospel of Jesus.
- As preachers they were heralds of a message that God entrusted to them about Jesus (*cf. v. 17b*; “word of Christ”).

Now, let me capture these conditions in a visual way for us.



This is how Paul says it works! First, God sends. Second, the preacher heralds the message of Jesus. Third, the listeners hear. Fourth, they must believe and call on Jesus.

- **Israel’s situation (15b–16)**

But how was it with the Israelite people? To answer this question, Paul twice quotes an OT prophet in verses 15 and 16. In Paul’s hands, Isaiah then describes their situation with initial joy that turns to sadness. Let’s see the joy in verse 15. **Read it.**

- **Beauty (15b)** – *As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news” (Isa 52:7)!*

In this verse, Paul begins by consulting a verse from a servant song of Isaiah. In this passage, “Isaiah had depicted a herald running across the mountains surrounding Jerusalem to bring the good news of victory over their enemies to God’s people.”<sup>252</sup> This part of Isaiah’s message is about the salvation that God will bring for the Israelite people in Jerusalem.

<sup>251</sup> Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 621.

<sup>252</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 500.

The way that he makes his point is to talk about the beautiful feet of the one proclaiming the news. Why does he speak here about beautiful feet? Have you ever thought about that? I have never seen beautiful feet! It's impossible physically! I have never thought: "Wow, those are beautiful feet!" Well, feet speak more fully of the person and his action of moving or arriving in the city with a good word!

Isaiah's message begins on a high point! He imagines the day when someone brings Israel good news of deliverance.

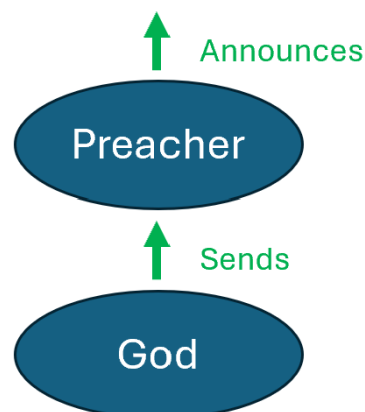
- **Sadness (16)** – <sup>16</sup> *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us" (Isa 53:1)?*

But then things go poorly. **Look at what Paul says in the next verse—verse 16.**

Isaiah begins with a person bringing good news to Jerusalem, but then no one believes the report.

- That is, they reject the good news being proclaimed.
- This verse contains another quote, this one coming from the significant servant song chapter of Isaiah—Isaiah 53.
- Perhaps, you remember this passage about the rejection of the Lord's deliverer.
  - He was despised and rejected by men.
  - He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
  - He bore our grief and carried our sorrows.
  - He was crushed for our iniquities.
  - We were healed with his wounds.
  - Yet, he was rejected by Israel.
- So, Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

This is where Paul's answer becomes explicit. To those who criticize him, Paul sees in his experience the same response that Israel gave to Isaiah. Paul is not the first sent one who was rejected by the Jewish people. Paul saw his ministry as a corollary to Isaiah's. Isaiah's joy turned to sadness in the rejection of his gospel is just like Paul's. Paul could pray to God as well, "Lord, who has believed our report?" To remind you of the first visual, the Israelites had both preliminary conditions for salvation fulfilled. God sent and the preacher announced.



The problem is they did not believe their report!

- **Final Summary (17)** – <sup>17</sup> *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

To this, Paul adds a final summary before moving on. He says faith comes from hearing and hearing comes through the word about Christ. This final statement helps us see again what the content of the preaching must be—Jesus. It is about Christ.

**b) More about Israel's unbelief: Although they have heard and understood, they remain disobedient (18–21)**

But Paul is not done finally describing the condition of Israel. Now, he gives more about their unbelief. He ends by using the Law, the Writings, and a double-quote from the Prophets to make his point. Now, he makes one point with each of these voices.

- **They have heard (18).** <sup>18</sup> *But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (Psa 19:4).*

Paul begins with confirming the fact that the Jewish people had heard the good news. To confirm that they did hear, he quotes from Psalm 19. **Read verse 18.**

- Now, interestingly enough, in that original Psalm, “the voice” and “the words” refer to the way the heavens and skies declare the glory of God and proclaim his handiwork.
- As a matter of fact, many commentators wonder exactly what Paul is doing here.
- How can Paul take a verse about creation and natural revelation and use it to prove that Israel has been fully exposed to the Word?
- We normally think that general revelation reveals God, but that special revelation of Scripture reveals the gospel.
- That is true, but it seems to me that Paul is using or applying this Psalms text in a new way.
- You can show reverence for a special book by putting it in a display case or by using it.
  - Paul knew that in the fuller context of Psalm 19 David transitions to how written revelation (the law) reveals God too.
  - So, Paul uses this text to talk about how the Jews heard the voice of the preachers of the gospel of Jesus.
    - If you look at Acts, for instance, you learn that early on voices like Peter and John proclaim the gospel of Jesus to Jewish people from throughout the whole known world at Pentecost.
    - Jewish proclamation of the gospel had the distinct advantage of the centralization of their faith around the annual feasts in the Temple in Jerusalem.
    - Jews from all around the world came back at these times and that day, they heard Jesus.

No doubt, Israel had many advantages that made them accountable. They have heard.

- **They have understood (19–21).** <sup>19</sup> *But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry” (Deut 32:21). <sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me” (Isa 65:1). <sup>21</sup> But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Isa 65:2).*

To this, Paul adds another question, only changing a verb. He moves from “heard” to “understand.” **Let’s read about it in verse 19–21.**

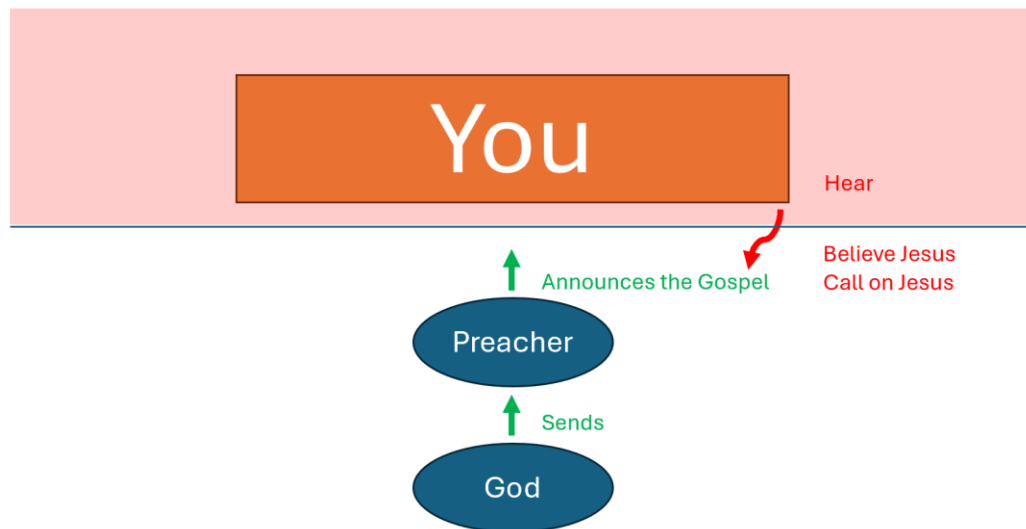
To prove that Israel has understood what the preachers have announced, Paul quotes first from Moses and then closes with Isaiah.

- The point from Moses involves God making Israel jealous by showing grace to outsiders.
  - More specifically, this verse comes from Moses’s song at the end of the book of Deuteronomy (ch. 32).
  - At this point in the song, Moses predicts what would happen to Israel in the coming days when they are disobedient.
  - When the Jews worship “no-gods”—idols—then God will answer directly by showing “no people”—gentiles—his grace.
  - “Not a nation” is literally “not a people.”
    - This was a derogatory way for the Israelites to refer to Gentiles.
    - They themselves were the “people of God;” others were nothing!
  - The point of the citation is clear enough, but it does not really help us to see that Israel understood their preachers.
- So, Paul adds to this the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 65.
  - Isaiah’s words are bold and clear.
  - He said that Gentiles were the ones who actually found him, although they were not seeking for him.
  - To those words about Gentiles, Paul quotes Isaiah in the final verse for what he says about Israel.
  - The final words of Paul are that God has extended his hands out to Israel all day long.
    - The “spreading out of the hands” was a gesture of reconciliation and welcome.
    - Here the imagery is so powerful!
    - God stands as a scorned-but-loving Father with open and outstretched hands.
    - By God’s grace, as a father, I have never experienced a wayward child, who scorned or rejected my earnest efforts to be reconciled to them.
    - I say that carefully this morning because I know that some of you *have* experienced that.
    - I do know what it is like to let a child go—to see them move out—and that was hard enough!

- I can only imagine the heartbreak of having a child leave while scorning and rejecting the love that I have for him or her.
- What a powerful picture of God!
- As a father, He is extending his arms “all day long.”

Although God is so gracious to them, they disbelieve—the opposite of faith (ἀπειθοῦντα)—and speak out against (ἀντιλέγοντα)—oppose obstinately—the gospel of Jesus. Paul himself knew what it means to violently reject and oppose the gospel and that is how many Jewish people in his day responded.

How about you? Has God stretched out his hands without effect to you? God has sent the preacher. He has announced the gospel of Christ to you. You have heard, but will you believe and call on Jesus?



How about you, Christian? Is God waiting for you to give up that sin and return? You have seen the necessary conditions—the unbreakable chain—yet are you willing? Is God sending you to announce the gospel of Christ to others. Some have never heard! Has God been patient with your laziness and comfort as well? Has he been waiting “all day long” for you regarding going? What can you do? What can you give? Who can you encourage? Where can you go?

## 2. What is happening with Israel (11:1–32)?

In Romans 9–10, Paul explores the reasons for Israel’s failure. The problem was not Paul’s, nor God’s, but the peoples’ themselves. Those two chapters describe the many ways that Israel tripped, stumbled, failed, and refused God.

As we move forward, Paul continues his emphasis on the Israelite people for one more chapter. Now, we might think—how foreign, how out of touch this is, but is it really?

- On the world scene and in American politics today, it’s amazing that one of the greatest global threats involves this little, mid-eastern nation.
- Just last night Iran launched over 200 drones and missiles at Israel.
- No matter of current politics is so dangerous and threatening as what is going on in Israel.

- If a visitor came to church this morning and read the first line of the sermon handout, he might actually accuse me of letting world events determine the topic of the sermon.
  - “Is this one of those churches that always only talks about what is relevant to itself?”
  - But that is not what we do here?
  - We do not go to the Bible primarily to see what it says for us and about us, but we go there to learn about God for He is worthy!
    - When our children were young, their aunt wrote stories about them with each child being the hero of his or her own story.
    - These became their favorite stories.
    - “I want to read the Emma story!”
  - Instead, we do section-by-section, verse-by-verse, through the Bible to learn more about God!

Having said that, in the next four Sundays in Romans, you will hear the most important words about Israel that you could ever hear.

Romans 11 is concerned with the present and future state of Israel. In this chapter, Paul uses a literary device to draw conclusions and make statements about Israel’s present (vv. 1–10) and future condition (vv. 11–32). He actually uses the same exact literary device (λέγω οὖν) in verse 1 and again in verse 11 to introduce what’s happening with Israel in the present and future. **Read vv. 1, 11.**

- While translated differently by the ESV in these texts, the same expression occurs.
- A word indicating that he is drawing a conclusion (“so, therefore”) is followed by the words “I ask” (“I say”).
- Then a question follows that expects a negative answer (“Has God rejected his people?”, “Did they stumble so that they might fall?”) and the immediate answer to both questions is “by no means.”
- These questions allow Paul to comment on Israel’s present and future.

Now, keeping that structure in mind will really help you in this chapter, but one other observation is even more valuable. The two questions do allow Paul to comment on Israel’s present and future, but they also allow him to demonstrate that Israel’s rejection is neither complete (vv. 1–10) nor final (vv. 11–32).<sup>253</sup>

**a. Israel’s rejection is not complete: commentary on their *present* condition (11:1–10).**

So, we start today in the first portion of the chapter where Paul answers the question whether God has rejected his people. **Let’s read his opening question in verse 1.**

**1) Opening question (1a) – <sup>1</sup> I ask, then, has God rejected his people?**

This question (μὴ ἄπώσατο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ) could more literally be translated like the NET Bible: “God has not rejected his people, has he?” I say that, not because I like it better, but

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<sup>253</sup> I am indebted to the work of John Stott, Charles Hodge, and Bryan Blazosky for this two-fold outline of Rom 11:1–32. Blazosky believes that this text is about 1) God not rejecting the nation of Israel completely (1–10) nor permanently (11–32). Cf. “Notes on Structure of Romans,” Blazosky. Quoting Charles Hodge, Stott writes, “So then ‘the rejection of the Jews was neither total nor final.’” Stott, *Romans*, 291. R. C. Sproul also preached a two-part exposition of these verses. His first sermon was entitled, “Israel’s rejection is not total”—his second “Israel’s rejection is not final.”

because the word “no” is built right into the question itself in Greek. The question leads the reader to answer, “No.”

Now, what you need to know about this question is that it does not come out of nowhere. Of course, the Holy Spirit led Paul to ask this specific question, but why? Or better yet, “Where?” In this expression, Paul takes a statement given twice in the OT and turns it into a question. It might be like me asking: “Did Noah find grace in the eyes of the Lord?” If I ask that question and if you are familiar with the OT, you know there is a right answer! You know there is only one way to correctly answer that question. The answer is “Yes, the Bible says, ‘Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.’”

When Paul asks “has God rejected his people,” he plays off two times where the OT says, “The Lord will not reject His people” (NIV).

- The first time we find this expression is in the farewell discourse of the great prophet Samuel. ***Do you remember Samuel?***
  - He is the prophet that God uses to transition the people from the wicked era of the judges to the kings.
  - Samuel’s own sons were not fit to judge the people, so somewhat reluctantly, he anoints the first two kings of Israel—King Saul and King David.
  - Well, in the midst of Samuel’s final words to people he encourages them with these words: “The Lord will not reject his people for his great name’s sake” (1 Sam 12:22a).
  - No doubt these words left a lasting impression on the people.
- And, in a sense, we know that they did because years later the psalmist of Israel cites this divine promise as well.
  - In Psalm 94, the psalmist calls for the judgment of the wicked and those evil people who were oppressing God’s people.
    - They were crushing them.
    - They were killing their widows.
    - They were murdering their orphans.
  - So, the psalmist calls on the “God of vengeance” to shine forth—to rise up and to repay (cf. 94:1–2).
  - In the second stanza of his psalm, the author warns the wicked by saying “the Lord will not reject his people, he will not abandon his heritage” (Psa 94:14).
  - No doubt, the Jewish people knew what these men said about how God would treat his people.

## 2) Two answers (1b–10)

So, what is the answer to Paul’s question? Well, he actually gives a short answer and a long answer to his question that comes out of the promises of God in the OT.

### a) The short answer (1b)

The short answer is found in the middle of verse 1. ***Let’s look there.***

- **Answer (1b) – *By no means!***

His answer is “by no means”—“may that never be.” The answer is an emphatic, “No.” Paul gives this answer ten times in Romans when he wants his readers to know that there is no way the previous question can be true! This is the ninth occurrence of ten in Romans.

- **Explanation (1c) – *For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.***

To this strong “no,” Paul gives a brief defense or explanation. One reason it cannot be that God rejected his people is the way God worked in one prominent, Jewish person.

- Paul offers his own salvation as an example of the fact that God has not rejected the nation of Israel completely.
- Cranfield writes, “Paul’s existence as a Jew who is also a Christian proves that the Jewish people as a whole” have not been rejected.<sup>254</sup>

Paul refers to his Jewish heritage in other important places in the NT (e.g., 2 Cor 11; Phil 3). This time he does so in order to show that God has not entirely—completely, totally—rejected his people. There is at least one descendant of Abraham—one member of the tribe of Benjamin—who God saved!

## b) The long answer (2–10)

God has not rejected his people entirely. Paul is the proof. But he has a longer answer to this question that is worth considering as well. The longer answer and its extended explanations are found in verses 2–10.

- **Answer (2a) – <sup>2</sup> God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.**

Let’s begin with this second answer at the beginning of verse 2. **Read 2a.**

If “no way” was not clear enough, Paul repeats the subject, verb, and object of his question to completely negate the thought—God has not rejected his people. “Did God reject his people... God did not reject his people.”

Paul only adds to this that God’s people—the Israelites—were foreknown.

- One of the clearest places in the OT that speaks to God’s exclusive love for the Israelite nation is Amos 3:2.
- It says, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”
- With this phrase the ancient prophet meant that God knew the Israelite people in a special way as his people.
- Paul takes that idea but goes back even further to say that before time—in eternity past—God knew his chosen people, Israel.
- For reasons known only entirely to God, he set his heart on the people of Israel—this little nation—from eternity past.

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<sup>254</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 544.

- God would not reject a people that he has known in such a close way from before the world was even created!
  - If some nations want to wipe Israel off the planet and give their land to another people, they should probably read their Bibles.
  - For instance, Jeremiah says, “Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.’ Thus says the Lord: ‘If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the Lord.’” (Jer 31:35–37)
  - Only if the sun stops shining, the moon and stars refuse to give light, and the waves of the sea cease entirely, should anyone be concerned that Israel will cease from being a nation!
  - There is more than an “iron dome” protecting Israel!
- **Explanations (2b–10)**

So, God has not rejected his people, Israel. Even now, in an age when God is working primarily with those from every nation and tongue who turn to him in Jesus, God has not entirely rejected his people, Israel.

Now, to help us understand this more fully, Paul gives positive and negative explanations in the following verses. The positive explanation is found in vv. 2b–6—the negative in vv. 7–10.

- **Positive explanation: the remnant are being saved today (2b–6)** – *Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?* <sup>3</sup> “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life” (1 Kgs 19:10). <sup>4</sup> *But what is God’s reply to him?* “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (1 Kgs 19:18). <sup>5</sup> *So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.* <sup>6</sup> *But if it by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

Let’s start with the positive explanation. **Look with me at verses 2b–6.**

Now, Paul’s positive explanation comes from the OT. More specifically, Paul uses the story of Elijah in the OT to talk about a small group of people that he calls “the remnant.” Let’s consider this in a few stages.

- **First, consider what Elijah says to God.** In verse 3, Paul cites what the prophet Elijah said to God when he was fleeing for his life from queen Jezebel and her husband Ahab. Elijah ran away, deep into the wilderness, and he curled up under a broom tree. Feeling all alone, Elijah wants God to take his life before the wicked queen takes him out!
- **But, secondly, consider how God responds.** In verse 4, Paul cuts straight to the part of God’s response that he finds relevant to his own story. God replies by saying to Elijah that he has “kept for himself” seven thousand men who have

refused to bow in idolatrous worship. Elijah's gloomy view of things was not accurate. It may have been easy for Elijah to think that he was the only one left, but that does not consider what God was doing. Seven thousand other men had refused to sin! Maybe Paul could identify with this!

- **But then, finally, let's consider the point of this story.** If you look at verse 5, Paul's purpose in referring to this little remaining remnant of faithful people in Elijah's story becomes clear. He says, "So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace." Being led by the Spirit, Paul also sees a hidden remnant among the Israelite people who are faithful because of God's grace. That is, Paul understands that some contemporary Jewish people were accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ and that there was a small number—besides himself—who are being saved. A few weeks ago, we came across the idea of a "remnant" and we learned that it indicates a small, leftover piece! In this passage, it speaks of a small number of Jewish people who believe in Jesus.

So, Paul wants to prove that God has not entirely rejected Israel and he offers proof. It starts with his own example—a descendent of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin. It also includes a remnant. A small but sure number of Jewish people, in Paul's generation and in ours', who are turning to faith in the Messiah, Jesus.

- **Negative explanation: the rest are hardened today (7-10)** – <sup>7</sup> *What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,* <sup>8</sup> *as it is written, "God gave them" (Deut 29:4) "a spirit of stupor" (Isa 29:10), "eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day" (Deut 29:4).* <sup>9</sup> *And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;"* <sup>10</sup> *let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever" (Psa 69:22-23).*

To these positive examples and explanations, Paul adds a negative one in the final verses of this section. **Look with me at verses 7-10.**

In this section, Paul closes his consideration of whether God has rejected his people with a frank acknowledgment of what is happening with "the rest" of the Jewish people. So, to understand these verses you need to know that God sees them in two groups—1) the remnant and 2) the rest.

More clearly at the end of verse 7, Paul says that "the rest were hardened." Now, we have seen "hardening" before. Do you remember?

- Several sermons ago, when we were talking about Romans 9, we looked at what the Bible says about the "hardening" of Pharaoh.
- Do you remember that?
  - Remember that we dealt with people who rise up in defense of poor, little, Pharaoh.
  - They think he was such a "swell guy," and they cannot imagine how God would harden Pharaoh.
  - Well, it was controversial to some—who actually hardened Pharaoh (*although it was not too controversial to me!*).

In this passage, however, Paul makes it abundantly clear who is presently hardening the hearts of the Jewish people. Notice three words in the middle of verse 8, “God gave them.” God is the one doing this.

To make this point, Paul actually quotes from every section of the Jewish scripture! This is a powerful form of Jewish argument! The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings all prove Paul’s point.

His answer from the OT starts in verse 8 and is quite clear.

- From Deuteronomy, Paul says, “God gave them ... eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”
  - At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses preaches some sermons to Israel.
  - In those final sermons, in chapter 29, he describes how God responded to the sins of the people of Israel.
  - Now, of special note, is that God’s hardening of them involved their external inability to perceive truth (*blind eyes, deaf ears*).
- To this, Paul adds an important statement from the prophet Isaiah.
  - Isaiah speaks of “a spirit of stupor” that was a part of God’s hardening as well.
  - But what does that mean and why does Paul add that?
    - Well, I do not use the word “stupor” much in my vocabulary. How about you?
    - Well, the other translations are not very helpful either.
      - The NIV, NAS, NET, all translate it “stupor.”
    - Lexicons are not very helpful either.
      - They supply the alternative “to be stupefied.”
      - I do not know what that really means either, although I must admit that it does not sound very good!
    - Well, in other places, it seems that the word speaks of the inability to think satisfactorily.
    - Now, another version translates it the spirit of “slumber.”
      - That picture might help us here.
      - Just as sleeping people awake insensitive to external stimuli and are dull and apathetic when they arise, so God hardens Israel by making them dull of thinking like a slumbering person.
    - Now, it is my perspective, that Paul adds this from Isaiah to not only add the comments of the prophets, but to also make the hardening even more thorough.

- Blind eyes and deaf ears speak of external inabilities, whereas a spirit of stupor speaks of their internal capacity to comprehend things.
- Finally, Paul adds the comments of David in Psalm 69.
  - **Read Rom 11:9–10.**
  - In the verses quoted, David pleads that his enemies would be judged.
  - He wants God to judge them in their 1) table, 2) eyes, and 3) backs.
  - Since his enemies had given him poisonous food, he wants “their table” (*food table or offerings*) to become a snare and a trap for them.
  - David knows the joy of a table of food for nourishment!
    - He said, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”
    - But he wants no such thing for the wicked!
  - He also asks God to blind “their eyes” and bend “their backs” (*speaking of carrying heavy loads*) forever.
  - Paul uses this verse because it also speaks of the various ways that God might judge those who are evil.

More specifically, these final verses in Romans 11, all speak of the thing that God has done in hardening Jewish people in this present age. If there is a remnant, then there is the rest as well. And “the rest” are insensitive to the gospel of the true Messiah, Jesus.

So, Paul has finished his argument and explanations. Has God entirely or completely rejected his people Israel? Although the majority have hard hearts to the gospel of Jesus Christ, God is saving a portion of them. He has not cast off his people entirely!

And they have a future as well. God is not done with them. So, let’s pray for them (*pray for their salvation, let’s consider going, and let’s rejoice in our great God*)! He always keeps his promises! If God short-changed the Jewish nation, then He would likely fail us too.

**b. Israel’s rejection is not final: commentary on their *future* condition (11:11–32).**

At the end of Romans 10, Paul gives a powerful picture of God. Perhaps, you remember it. When we went through that passage, we considered that Israel was stubborn and obstinate, yet God was like a father with outstretched hands. Normally, outstretched hands are the posture of prayer and intimacy in scripture. What a great reversal that God would intreat and long for Israel with outstretched hands! Although the people failed repeatedly, God kept his arms open! He was willing and planning to embrace them again.

Within Romans 11, Paul speaks more about what this hope looks like presently and in the future. More specifically, he uses two questions (“so, I ask ...”) in verses 1 and 11 to introduce arguments about Israel’s rejection not being complete (vv. 1–10) nor final (vv. 11–32). In this chapter, we will learn that there remains a future for Israel.

Paul's larger argument in verses 11 through 32 moves from Israel's failure (11a) to their salvation (26). Those are the two larger considerations that Paul makes to demonstrate that their rejection is not final. Now, this section is too large to consider in one sermon, so we will break it in three. This week and next, we will consider more about Israel's failure (vv. 11–24) and, Lord willing, in two weeks we will consider more about Israel's final salvation (vv. 25–32).

## 1) About Israel's failure (11–24)

To make a long argument about Israel's failure in verses 11–24, Paul considers purposes (11–15) and makes analogies (16–24). Today, we will look at the purposes.

Have you ever struggled with motivation to live a fully Christian life? Perhaps, you are in a lull. Today, we are going to consider a passage that provides deep motivation for us!

### a) Purposes for Israel's failure (11–15)

The divine purposes for Israel's failure are two-fold.

- **It was not that Israel might permanently fall (11a).** <sup>11</sup> *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!*

Before Paul offers the proper or right purposes involved in Israel's failure, he dismisses one. **Look with me at the beginning of verse 11.**

In this first part of the verse, Paul returns to the theme of stumbling. In earlier chapters, we learned that Israel stumbled over the great stone that became God's cornerstone. They did not believe in Jesus and rejected him. This is what Paul calls "stumbling."

Here he asks if their stumbling was solely for the purpose that they might fall. This is a vivid picture where Paul presents Israel corporately as one. Have you ever seen someone stumble and fall before? How about someone stumbling and almost falling? Sometimes that can be even more enjoyable to watch!

When I taught, I enjoyed one classroom more because of the big window in the back of the room. When the snow turned to ice, unexpected students would be my entertainment as they fell and then got up before anyone could see them!

Paul has Israel stumbling "on a stone in its path that has knocked it off balance, but not so badly that they fall."<sup>255</sup> That is, Paul does not see the stumbling of Israel as irrecoverable, leading to irreversible ruin. No, Paul rejects this! He believes that "it is possible [for them] to recover."<sup>256</sup> Israel's failure was not that they might permanently fall.

- **It was so that salvation could come to the nations (11b).** *Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles.*

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<sup>255</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 534.

<sup>256</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 555.

Instead, God had a foundational purpose in Israel's failure and rejection. ***Look with me now at the middle of verse 11.***

A divine purpose in Israel's rejection of Jesus was so that salvation would come to the nations—the Gentiles. Way back in the Abrahamic promises, we learned that God's blessing would come through Abraham's descendants to all the families of the earth.

Now, Paul calls this rejection of Jesus “their trespass.” That is, Israel's false step in rejecting the “salvation” that Jesus offered them has opened the door for the nations.

- “Salvation” is a word that we use often in Christianity, but it is not used often used in normal speech.
- The word “saved” is, however.
  - When people are in a fire and a fireman rescues them, he “saves” them.
  - When crews work at a catastrophe to see if there are any survivors, they work to “save” them.
- The Bible also speaks of the verb “save.”
  - The angel announced that Joseph should call the baby in Mary's womb Jesus for “he will ‘save’ his people from their sin.”
  - That is the normal way the NT talks about “saving.”
  - It also calls Jesus, the “Savior” because he saves people from their sin.
- Now, what Jesus the Savior provides when he saves us is “salvation”—deliverance from all our sin and its terrible consequences, including death, hell, and God's wrath. That is what God can do for you too—if you turn to him!

Even in Paul's own ministry, we can see the Jewish trespass opening an opportunity for the Gentiles. Paul's normal practice was to go to the Jewish people until they rejected him and then he would go to the Gentiles. Let me show you a few places.

The book of Acts portrays the missionary journeys of Paul. In Acts 12, Paul is chosen and sent by the first people who were called “Christians.” Paul had been ministering to the church of Antioch for a year, but then they sent him off with the gospel.

- On Paul's first missionary journey, he went with Barnabas to cities and towns in Cyprus, Psidia, and Galatia.
  - Cyprus – On Cyprus, he begins in the synagogue of the Jews in Salamis (13:5).
  - Psidia – In Psidia, he starts in the synagogue of Antioch (13:14b; 44) and remains there ministering to the Jewish people until, the Jews become jealous and contradict him (13:45). So, Paul turns to the Gentiles (13:46), and they believe in droves (13:48).
  - Galatia – Then Paul goes to the province of Galatia. He starts in Iconium in the synagogue (14:1), but Jews stir up opposition (14:2) so that townspeople eventually try to stone Paul and force him to flee. That is when he goes to Lystra and begins ministering until the Jewish opposition follows him from Antioch and Iconium and successfully stone him (14:19).

- On Paul's second missionary journey, he receives a vision to go with Silas to Macedonia and Achaia.
  - He starts in Philippi by going out to the riverside (*because the city did not have a synagogue*) and ministers the gospel among some Jewish women (16:13) and has some success before he is imprisoned and forced to leave.
  - Paul goes next to Thessalonica and starts his evangelistic efforts again among the Jews for three Sabbath days (17:1–2). That is when new Jewish opposition arises in this city as well. The text says that they were jealous, they formed a mob, set the whole city in an uproar, attacked Paul's friend, and wanted to get to him. That is when believers smuggle him away to another city.
  - Next, Paul goes to Berea. He starts again among the Jewish people in the synagogue (17:10). These Jews were more noble than the others that Paul encountered and many believed. But then, the Jews from Thessalonica followed him and stirred up crowds against him so that he had to leave (17:13).
  - Then Paul goes to Athens. He begins there among the Jews in the synagogue as well (17:17) but has more success among the Gentiles on Mars Hill (17:34).
  - Finally, Paul goes to Corinth where we can see both Jewish rejection and Gentile acceptance of Paul's gospel. Again, he starts with the Jews in the synagogue every Sabbath (18:4–5) until they oppose and revile him (18:6). That is when Paul turns to the Gentiles and finds much fruit among the people of Corinth (18:7–8).

As can be seen in the ministry of the apostle Paul, the Jewish people corporately, mainly, rejected Jesus. This does not mean that every Jew rejected him. No, God is working even now with a remnant. But the Jewish political and religious leaders of the people in most cities and towns and the crowds of Jewish people in those cities rejected him. In response to that and to the call of God, Paul's mission was "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8).

Here, in Rom 11:11, Paul says that it was "through their trespass that salvation came to the Gentiles."

- **It was also so that Israel would become jealous (11c–15).** *So as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their failure means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! <sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?*

Next, Paul pulls a surprise move with Gentile believers at the very end of verse 11 through verse 15. **Let's read those verses.**

Here we encounter God's ultimate purposes (*and Paul's!*) that involve salvation and the Jewish people. God's salvation in Jesus has come to the Gentiles "to make Israel jealous" (εἰς τὸ παραζηλῶσαι αὐτούς). Now, with this very important phrase, it is my desire that we learn Paul's thinking, commitments, and values! That is why Romans is so helpful! We get into the mind of Paul and see how he reasons. Paul repeats the rare idea of making the Jews jealous twice in this paragraph (vv. 11, 14).

Now, to understand this text, I think that it is best to answer a few important questions.

**First, what does making Israel jealous mean?** Now, we do not normally think of jealousy as something good, yet Paul's argument here is positive!

- The word “jealous” comes from a rare word used only four times by Paul (*Rom 10:19; 11:11, 14; 1 Cor 10:22*).
  - It is a compound word that means to “provoke to jealousy” or “provoke to envy.”
  - We feel this envy when we experience loss and the aching void that it creates.
  - When this rare word is used in the OT and NT is normally carries the sense of a “righteous jealousy”—a positive jealousy or envy; instead of the way we sometimes think of the negative jealousy that comes from covetousness or greed.
- This word is normally used in the OT of God being provoked to jealousy or envy over the idolatrous worship of his people.
  - Key to the thought here is that God deserved the singular worship of his covenanted people.
  - When they ran off to another, it “provoked him to jealousy.”
  - As a matter of fact, one place near the end of Deuteronomy makes this very clear: “They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deut 32:21).
  - Now, I am convinced that this prophecy of Moses is on Paul's mind!
  - We can know that because he actually quoted it in Rom 10:19.
- So, Paul wants God to fulfill his Word through his ministry to the Gentiles.
- He wants the Jews to grow jealous!

Just think about it from Paul's perspective! Gentile believers were believing in the Messiah—the anointed One—the One through whom all the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are being fulfilled. Paul hopes that his fervent ministry among the Gentiles and the growing popularity of the gospel among the Gentiles will stir up his own Jewish people.

**But why would Paul tell us that?** That is like someone telling us that they spend a lot of time with us so that they can make their friend or brother or sister jealous! Well, Paul tells us in the next few verses that he wants them to be jealous not so that they would reject him (*negative jealousy*) but that some of them would be saved (*positive jealousy*)!

He elaborates in verses 12–15. His elaboration asks how much more blessing the future “full inclusion” and “acceptance” of the Jewish people will bring to the Gentiles. He repeats the argument twice. Once in verse 12 and then, after calling on his apostolic authority and calling to Gentiles and magnifying it, he exhorts Gentiles by that authority and calling to pay attention to a similar argument in verses 13–15. Notice that he says, “I am speaking to you, Gentiles” (v. 13). It is like me calling out to someone in class or in the auditorium, “I am speaking to you.”

Now, the nub of the argument here is that if the rejection of Israel brought us good things, then their future acceptance and inclusion in God's people will bring us even greater things.

- We might think that if God decides to work again with the Jewish people specifically, then we would no longer experience the blessings of salvation.
- That is not true, however.
- Instead, when God fully restores and saves the Jewish people, it will be "life from the dead."
  - This phrase is only used here in the Bible.
  - It is not clear what it refers to exactly.
  - Scholars have different ideas.
  - I think this is Paul's way to speak of all the blessings that we and the Jewish people will experience when God restores Israel.
  - When that happens, "the Deliverer will come from Zion to turn away godlessness from Jacob... and all Israel will be saved."
  - When God saves them, they will be given new life again!
  - They will experience again "full inclusion" and "acceptance" (*God's welcome and perhaps also our welcome*).
  - That is, the future redemption of Israel will lead to the final resurrection of OT saints, which ushers in great blessings for all of God's people!

Can you imagine the joy of seeing millions of Jewish people turn to believe in Jesus and be saved? Can you also imagine the joy of experiencing all the blessings of being forgiven by God in Jesus's presence?

As we close, I want to make two applications clear for us.

- **First, we must know that God's future plans involve the massive, miraculous conversion of the Jewish people.**
  - When Jesus comes from Zion to deliver them, they will be converted in a sweeping miraculous wave as Paul himself was converted.
  - *Remember?*
  - When Paul was on the road to Damascus, he saw Jesus in a miracle and he immediately believed.
  - The same will happen for the Jewish people in the end.
  - When they see him come in the clouds to make war for them, they will all believe!
  - God's future plans involve the massive, miraculous conversion of Israel.
- **Second, may it be our aim to live in such a way to stir others to want Christ.**
  - We must be people who savor and enjoy God's goodness and blessings so much that it stirs others to see it.
    - I spent this last week in NC with some men on a retreat.
    - One of those men was saying to me that his wife always asks him what and where he eats when he is gone.
    - He said that when he describes it to her, it always makes her want to eat that same food in the days ahead!

- Maybe you have seen someone eat a delicious watermelon on a hot summer day or a piece of blueberry cheesecake and thought I want that!
- Have you ever seen someone enjoy eating something?
- Oh, that people would long for Christ because of how we enjoy him—how we delight in and live by His Word! We are sometimes so far away from this! Sins—even private sins—strip us of all such joy!
- May unsaved husbands envy the stability and peace and joy that Jesus gives to their believing wives. May he look on her with love and then desire what she has in Jesus more and more!
- May unbelieving fathers and mothers observe how God has changed their son or daughter and want them for themselves!
- May our neighbors and co-workers see how much we savor Jesus and long to experience our insatiable appetite for God and His Word that they want it for themselves!

Do your friends and family see you tasting and savoring and cherishing Jesus and His Word? May it be and may God help us!

#### **b) Analogies of Israel's failure (16–24)**

In Rom 11:11–24, Paul not only gives two purposes for Israel's failure, he also gives two analogies of it. Sometimes it is good for someone to quickly rehearse exactly why something has happened, other times it is good for him to more fully explain it. That is what Paul does here. He illustrates Israel's failure for us with two images: 1) a lump of dough and 2) an olive tree.

Now, God has an important lesson for us in these two illustrations. Sometimes, vivid pictures teach us things that entire books cannot. The old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words" often holds true. Sometimes, images grab our attention and teach us more lasting lessons than entire books. It is my prayer today that God will use these two images to help us.

***Let's read the whole way through the passage so that we can get it in our minds.***

- **Dough (16a)** – <sup>16</sup> *If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump.*

So, the first analogy that Paul gives us is of a lump of dough. He does not use this analogy long until he turns to another. As a matter of fact, only the first half of one verse contains this picture. In Rom 11:16a, Paul explains that Israel's failure is like dough.

***Let's read it.***

Now this imagery is both familiar to us and, at the same time, distant.

- We can understand how a little contaminant like yeast can start small and then affect all our dough.
- That is normally how Paul uses this analogy.

- The three times he uses the word outside of Romans, “whole lump” (φύραμα) is used for how one sin can thoroughly contaminate the church like yeast in a lump of dough.<sup>257</sup>

The picture in this passage, however, is a bit different. Instead of “sin” working its way in and through the church, this time it’s “holiness” or “sanctification.” ***But what does that mean?***

Well, that is where knowledge of Jewish practices under the law is necessary. In at least two places in the OT—Numbers 15 and Leviticus 23—the children of Israel are commanded to give the firstfruits of their bread (*or dough*) to God as an offering. They were not to eat their bread until this sacrifice was made and this was to be “a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live” (Lev 23:14).

Frank Thielman explains this well. He writes, “When Jews in Paul’s time prepared their daily bread for cooking, they set aside a small piece of dough as an offering to God and believed that God sanctified the rest of the dough and blessed their house.”<sup>258</sup> So, the firstfruits was a smaller, preliminary part of the whole lump that was given over to God—devoted to God—so that all the bread in the home would also be devoted to God.

So, that is the image, but what does it represent? Well, this is a difficult question that demands further relating this image to the one that follows. I think it might be best to see the firstfruits of dough as referring to the patriarchs and the whole lump that followed as their descendants among the Jewish people.

- **Olive tree (16b–24)** – *And if the root is holy, so we are branches. <sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. <sup>19</sup> Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. <sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. <sup>23</sup> And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup> For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.*

But Paul moves quickly away from that image to one he prefers more. The next illustration is one that he develops throughout the rest of the paragraph. This image is of an olive tree.

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<sup>257</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 5:6, 7; Gal 5:9.

<sup>258</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 539.

Now, one of the most perplexing things issues concerning this analogy is to make sense of the first expression, found at the end of verse 16. It says, “And if the root is holy, so also the branches.”

So, we have to deal with this analogy *as it* appears and put together the whole imagery that Paul gives through the rest of this paragraph. Let me point out a few, preliminary things from the text before we work through it briefly, verse-by-verse.

Our foundational observations involve three objects in the metaphor: the 1) branches, the 2) root, and 3) the olive tree.

- **Branches** – The rest of the passage clearly articulates what the branches illustrate.
  - Paul says that the branches of the olive tree were broken off because of “their unbelief” (v. 20).
  - The word “unbelief” is not used by Paul much and only in Romans.
  - In an earlier passage, he used this word specifically of the Jewish people who lacked faith (*Rom 3:1–3*).
  - In other places, he calls these the “natural branches,” and later calls his readers (“you”) unnatural branches from a wild olive tree.
    - There Paul engages in a diatribe with an imagined, Gentile believer.
    - Paul says he is like a barren branch from a scraggly tree with nasty roots.
    - But God has grafted him in and made something special of him!
  - In verse 16, however, the branches refer to the Israelite people.
- **Root** – Identifying the significance and meaning of the “root” is more difficult and it is not always necessary to discern the “exact” identity of every piece of every metaphor used by biblical authors. Sometimes, they are simply portraying a picture and authors do not desire or expect readers to identify every piece.
  - With that disclaimer in mind, there are five observations that we can make about this root before I discuss its meaning.
    - **First, the root is holy (ἁγία)—it is sanctified, set apart, or devoted to God.** This speaks to the unique character or nature of the root. Unfortunately, this is the only time in the Bible where a “root” is described as devoted to God or set apart.
    - **Second, Gentile believers are “sharers” or “partakers” (συγκοινωνός) of this root (v. 17b).**
    - **Third, we learn more about the nature of the root. It belongs to an olive tree (v. 17b).** I do not want to do too much with that right now. I will simply say that Paul’s point here is to use a metaphor of a particular type of tree—an olive tree.
    - **Fourth, the root of this olive tree provides “fatness” or “nourishment” (v. 17b).**
      - The ESV translates it as a “nourishing root.”
      - The root provides nourishment or fatness for the tree!
      - Some other translations take this more literally as “the root of fatness.”

- Remembering their ancient culture, “fatness” spoke of something that was well nourished or that was well provided for.
  - In Judg 9:9 LXX, we learn that olive trees, in particular, were known for their fatness—their olives provided nourishment, fatness.
  - Both the words for “olive tree” and “fatness” are used in the passage.
  - Other trees are described for what they provide, but the olive tree was known for one thing—its fatness.
- Now, the word for “nourishing” or “fatness” is only used this time in the NT.
- Its OT use, however, is very informative.
  - In its eleven occurrences, it often speaks of what God—Yahweh—provides for the earth (Psa 65:10), for the children of mankind (Psa 36:8), and for his chosen people (cf. Gen 27:28, 39).
    - This last reference is especially instructive for us.
    - **Read both verses.**
    - In this chapter, Isaac is deceived by Jacob and then prays a blessing over him.
    - He prays that God blesses Jacob with the “fatness” of the earth.
    - In the following verses, however, he laments that his prayer cannot be the same for Esau.
      - Esau’s dwelling will be away from the “fatness” of the land.
      - Esau will not experience the same kind of blessing and nourishing provision as Jacob.
  - So, this root provides “nourishment” or “fatness” to the branches!
- **Finally, the root also supports us (βαστάζεις; v. 18).**
  - This word is used 27 times in the NT, often in the sense of “carrying” someone or something.
  - It is used of carrying sandals, a water jug, a coffin, a money bag, and of carrying one’s cross.
  - Physically, it is also often used of someone stronger carrying someone weaker.
  - Metaphorically, it is used of carrying or supporting the weak brother (*Rom 15:1*) and the burdens for the weak (*Gal 6:2, 5*). Again, the stronger “carries” or “supports” the weaker.
  - In one text, it is also used of a mother who bears—gives birth to—her child.
  - Here then, it probably portrays the root as a source of strength that supports or sustains the (weaker) branches.
- So, what does the “root” stand for in this metaphor?
  - Well, some interpreters use passages like Isa 11 and 53 to say that the root refers to Christ.

- While the word “root” is used of one “who like a root will appear out of parched soil” and one “who will come forth from Jesse to rule the Gentiles,” I am not convinced that Paul has this exclusively in mind here.
  - The NT makes it clear primarily in Acts and Romans that the Jewish people almost immediately and comprehensively rejected Jesus.
  - If Jesus is the root, when could it be said of the Israelite nation that they were nourished by him?
- Others say that the root refers to the Patriarchs—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
    - So, the firstfruits are the forefathers—the first objects of God’s promises—and the rest of the dough is Israel.
    - The root is the forefathers—the patriarchs—and the branches are their descendants.
    - You say, where do you find evidence for that view in this passage?
    - Well, in Rom 11:28 says, “As regards the gospel, they [the Jews] are enemies for your sake [the sake of Gentile believers]. But as regards election, they [the Jews] are beloved for the sake of their forefathers [because of the forefathers].”
    - There, Paul says that the Jews remain beloved people because of their forefathers.
    - So, if unbelieving Jews today are disconnected from the root, they become disconnected from their founding fathers.
  - In light of both images here, I think this view is better.
  - So, the firstfruits are the forefathers of the Jewish people who were devoted to the Lord. The whole lump is the Jewish people who come of the same, but later substance.
  - The roots are the forefathers, the earliest of those set apart by God. The branches are the Jewish people, the latest of those devoted to God.
  - Using both analogies together (*especially considering v. 16a*) hems me in!
  - Now, I want to add one very important qualification here!
  - To be cut away from the forefathers is to be cut away most significantly from the nourishment, fatness, and blessing which God promised and provides.
  - The analogy, therefore, claims that disobedient, Jewish people who reject Jesus are disconnected from the fountain of God’s blessing—the fatness, the richness—that He has promised originally to the Patriarchs.
- **Olive tree**

That leaves one part of the metaphor undefined—the olive tree. And I will just say here that I think it might strain the point of the metaphor to identify this tree with anything in particular. If pressed, I might suggest that the tree refers to “the people of God,” but I would put a question mark or two after that!

Most confidently, I say that the “branches” were to the Israelites, and then less confidently, I say that the “root” refers to the patriarchs—the original objects of God’s promises. With this in mind, let’s go through the analogy, verse-by-verse.

- **Read verses 17–18a.**

- Notice, only “some” of the branches—the natural branches, Israel—were broken off.
  - Imagine an olive tree with 20 branches, 18 of them are broken off, but two do remain.
  - This preserves God’s promise of a “remnant” of Jewish people who *do* believe in Jesus today!
- The predominant emphasis in these verses, however, is placed on a warning to the unnatural branches who have been grafted in their place, not to be arrogant toward or against the branches.
  - Gentile believers in Jesus are not to grow arrogant against the branches.
  - Which branches?
    - Well, it might be the natural branches who remain (*the two!*).
      - If so, Paul is instructing Gentile believers not to be arrogant toward their Jewish brothers or sisters in the church, but to demonstrate humility toward them.
      - This emphasis might then reappear in Romans 14 and 15.
    - More likely, however, Gentile believers are not supposed to be arrogant against the natural, Jewish branches who have been broken off (*the 18!*).
      - The text and others like it should be enough for believers to avoid my version of *antisemitism*.
      - Unfortunately, however, historically that has not been true of humanity or believers more specifically.
      - I find it no coincident, but a tribute to God’s amazing and sovereign purposes for our church that we are study this passage at a time in world history when people are rising in protest against the Jewish nation.
      - Even in our own country, on college campuses even in our own state, marches and protests and riots are being initiated by people who hate Israel and arrogantly boast over them!
        - Now listen, all ethnic discrimination or racism is strictly forbidden in the Bible.
        - Jesus dies for and loves the nations; we must love them all too!
        - This text, however, explicitly condemns any kind of prejudice against the Jewish people.
- Now, Paul’s warning continues and grows even sharper than this. **Look with me at verses 18b–20.**
  - Paul knows us too well! He’s been around Gentiles who start gloating over the fact that God chose them to replace the disobedient, Jewish people.
  - He knows that we might let this get into our heads!

- So, he says, “Do not be arrogant.” “You do not support or sustain anything.” “You are being sustained.”
- Then he says again at the end of verse 20, “Do not become proud, but fear.”
  - Do not be arrogant but show fear—be afraid and timid.
  - Now, that seems like a warning, right?
- Well, it is and if you keep reading you can see why we should not be proud! **Look now at the next verses—verses 21–22.**
  - Paul says, “Do not think too highly or too much of yourselves—professing, Gentile believers—because God can cut you off too.”
  - This does not mean that some believers lose their salvation, it means that some Gentiles who claim or profess to believe will eventually be judged by God for their unbelief.
  - God is severe against anyone who does not genuinely believe in his Son, Jesus.
  - The word for “severity” is used only here in the NT (twice), but it speaks of God’s inflexible judgment against those who reject His Son.
  - An adverbial form of this word is used twice in the NT to speak of “severe” or “sharp” rebuke (*cf. 2 Cor 13:10; Titus 1:13*).
  - This is a very strong word that speaks of God “lopping off” or “severing” those who do not believe in His Son.
- But Paul ends with another word of hope for the Jewish people. **Look with me at the final verses of this paragraph—verses 23–24.**
  - If (*and considering the next passage, “when!”*) the Jewish people turn to believe in Jesus, they too will be brought back in because God can do that too!
  - God is powerful enough to take these broken off branches and reattach them to his tree!

Now, having worked to understand the analogies in this passage, what are we to do with them? How are they to change us? What lesson do these pictures teach?

Well, the main point for us is found clearly in verse 22. **Read it again.** Today, we must behold or observe God’s generosity and His severity. This beholding God for who He is should then fill us with humility and respect.

- Genuine believers in Jesus are fervently humble about their standing. We had nothing to offer! We were nasty and ugly—fruitless and scraggly.
- Genuine believers in Jesus are also filled with fear or awe when considering the severity—the inflexible judgment of God that does not bend. God will not accept anyone who is unbelieving, and His judgment is severe.

Now, as we approach the Table this morning, can you think of a better illustration of the place where God’s severity and kindness met than the cross? Jesus understood both the severity and kindness of God in the Garden, and—though he did not want to drink the cup of suffering and death—he submitted to the cross so that any who believe will be saved.

May our partaking of the symbolic body and blood of Christ remind us all today that God is severe in his judgment but generous in his grace!

## **2) About Israel's salvation (25–32)**

In Romans 11, Paul expounds on Israel's present failure. He intends to show that the rejection of Israel is neither complete (vv. 1–10) nor final (vv. 11–32). Today, we come to the clearest text which shows that God is not done entirely with the Israelite people, but, instead, that they have a bright future.

Now, the final verses of this section come in two parts: 1) the salvation plan of God is revealed in verses 25–27 and 2) the status of the Jews is summarized in verses 28–32. This morning, we will consider God's plan in verses 25–27.

As we do so today, we come to one of the most significant passages in the Bible that testifies to a “premillennial return” of Jesus. This passage does not prove it, but it is best understood to testify to this interpretation. Other texts can no doubt be used to demonstrate such a view and we will read at least one of those today! When we talk about the second coming of Jesus, a “premillennial return” means that Jesus comes back to deliver the Israelite people and then reign and rule over them for 1,000 years in the future.

I have a close friend that I served with in Minnesota.

- His name is Matt Morrell and he is the senior pastor of Fourth Baptist Church and president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
- I not only served alongside him for three years, we went to Bible College together and were in each other's weddings.
- Matt and I agree on much, although there are some minor but obvious differences between us!
  - One such difference is that Matt is 5'5".
  - I am 6'5"; he is 5'6".
  - Needless to say, the wedding pictures are a bit humorous!
- Well, Matt likes to say that he is “Pre-trib, Pre-mill, and Pre-shrunk!”
  - I think that he got that from his father, who was a 5 foot pastor too!
  - Matt believes that Jesus will 1) take church believers to heaven before the tribulation and 2) then return seven years later to rescue Israel and set up a millennial kingdom.
  - Now, I can say that I am two of those things—“Pre-trib and Pre-mill,” although I am definitely not pre-shrunk!

Today, we will consider a passage that I feel is best interpreted in this way!

- Now, you should not just believe something because a 5'6" guy has a funny way to remember it or your pastor holds it.
- You can and should look at these things for yourselves this morning!
- As you do, might I say that Paul desires for us to know all about God's salvation plan so that this knowledge bears fruit in our lives!
- I will try to point that out along the way as well!

## a) The plan of God (25–27)

We can summarize what Paul says about God’s salvation plan in three ways.

- **God’s salvation plan is a mystery now revealed (25a).** <sup>25</sup> *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers.*

First, God’s plan is a mystery now revealed. **Look with me at the beginning of verse 25.**

Paul moves to direct talk in this passage. He’s finished his two analogies about 1) the lump of dough and 2) the olive tree. Now, he uses straight-talk and calls out his reader (“you,” “you,” “believers”).

- Paul does not want his primarily Gentile readers in Rome to be wise in their own estimation.
  - The first part of this verse then is Paul encouraging Roman believers to avoid the error warned against in Prov 3:7, where the author says not to be “wise in our own eyes.”
  - In Romans, it could be translated, “in order that you are not wise in your own judgment.”
  - This admonition is very important to Paul as he repeats it a chapter later in 12:16.
  - “Do not be wise in your own judgment.”
    - Now, Paul has already been challenging Gentile believers not to be arrogant.
    - As a matter of fact, we made much out of this last week.
    - Do you remember? As a grafted in, wild olive shoot, we are not to be arrogant against the branches that were broken off!
  - Perhaps, you know someone who only seems to be impressed with their own views or takes on things.
    - No one else sees politics or controversial issues like them.
  - That is being wise in our own eyes!
    - Most of us, however, have learned to hide our own arrogance!
    - We sugar coat things so that it is not obvious to others that we are most impressed with our own thinking!
    - We hide our arrogance as much as we can!
- But Paul will not let us remain this way and his cure is knowledge of something—knowledge of God’s plan.
  - If we can get God’s salvation plan in our lives it will keep us from pride.
  - What we will learn today has to do with the eternal, sovereign God’s plan with sinful humanity.
  - When we understand it, we will not grow inflated!

- Paul will not let them be ignorant of something so important! So, this opening is like Paul saying, “Pay attention to what I am just about to write.”

Paul reveals God’s mysterious salvation plan, so we do not get full of ourselves.

- **God’s plan has three stages (25b–26a).** *A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* <sup>26</sup> *And in this way all Israel will be saved.*

So, what is God’s plan? Well, next we learn what it is and how it unfolds. His plan unfolds in three stages. That is, there are three phrases where the content of God’s plan is revealed, and these three phrases reveals three stages of salvation history. **Look with me at the middle of verse 25.**

The language here is important. Let’s consider it in stages:

- **First, “a partial hardening has come upon Israel”** (πώρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν).
  - Earlier in this chapter, Paul revealed that Israel’s rejection is not complete in this current time.
  - Although the majority of Jewish people have rejected Jesus, a remnant of them—a small number of them—have indeed trusted in Jesus as their Savior.
  - Paul says that the “hardening” is partial, not full. It is partial in that only a part of the Israelite people are hardened.
  - So, this is what happened to Israel in the past.
- **But second, in the present, Paul says, “until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in”** (ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ).
  - In our present age, many among the nations are coming to faith in Jesus Christ.
  - Let me point out, however, that the word “until” tells us that Israel’s hardening will occur for a limited time until Gentile fullness comes in.
  - Now, what does “the fullness of the Gentiles coming in” mean?
    - That is an unusual expression that we do not really use very much, right?
    - Do you normally talk about the “fulness of the Gentiles” being brought into something?
    - It is unusual, but it seems important!
  - Well, “the fullness of the Gentiles” likely refers to the full number of those Gentiles who believe in Jesus—the full measure of Gentiles who will be saved.
  - There is a breadth and depth to the full number of Gentiles that will be converted.
  - Imagine a room that is filling up with people.
  - People keep crowding in until the full number fill the room.
  - Paul is talking about the day when God brings the last Gentile to Jesus.
    - We do not think about this much.
    - We think things will just keep on clicking along day by day as normal.

- One day, however, the last Gentile will be converted—oh, how amazing to be that person!—and that will be “the fullness of the Gentiles being brought in.”
- **Finally, in the future, there will be a third stage—“and in this way all Israel will be saved”** (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).
  - This expression starts with two words in the original which denote the next stage in God’s program.
  - It could be translated more literally “and so.”
  - Many translations take it that way!
  - What follows it is the next or final stage in God’s salvation plan!
  - In other words, it seems to me that Paul is expressing temporally three things that occur in sequence.<sup>259</sup>
    - First, partial hardening happened to Israel.
    - Second, the fullness of the Gentiles is being brought into salvation.
    - Finally, “all Israel will be saved.”
- But what does that mean?
  - Well, this is one of those loaded expressions that demand that we look closely at every word! So, let’s pick it apart before putting it back together again.
    - First, what does Paul mean when he says “Israel” here?
      - Well, believe it or not, there are different opinions on that!
      - Fortunately, however, Paul has already used this word ten times in this section.
      - In the other nine times, it always refers to ethnic *Israelites*.
        - If you have questions on those other occurrences, you can go back and listen to some of the sermon recordings.
        - A good example of Paul’s use of “Israel” for “ethnic Israelites” is 11:2b–3. **Read verses 2b–3.**
          - I am sure that when Elijah appealed to God against Israel, he was not thinking about a spiritual Israel made up of believing Jews and Gentiles.
          - No, Elijah was complaining about the Jewish people.
          - The Israelite people were the ones who killed all the prophets and neglected the altars of God!
  - So, that is how I take it here.

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<sup>259</sup> In 1 Cor 11:28, Paul uses these two words to say that we should examine ourselves, “and so” eat of the bread and drink of the cup. In 1 Cor 14:25, the secrets of unbelievers are revealed through prophecy “and so” he falls on his knees and worships.

- Just before this in verse 25, the partial hardening of Israel referred to the partial hardening of the Israelite people.
  - Israel is the same thing in verses 25 and 26.
  - As a matter of fact, later in verse 26, Paul refers to these people as “Jacob,” which is another clear picture of the ethnic descendants of Jacob—the Israelite people.
- Next, what does “all Israel” mean?
    - And, again, it is hard to believe how many people say that “all” Israel does not mean “all.”
    - As a matter of fact, many commentators say that this refers to “many” Israelites being saved.
    - One man that I normally agree with, says, “When it says ‘all Israel will be saved,’ I think it is to be taken as a figure of speech—as hyperbole—as a vast number, a huge number of Jews who will be saved.”<sup>260</sup>
    - But, if there is a way, to allow “all” to mean “all,” that is my preference.
      - As a normal rule, we should take the most obvious, the plainest, clearest meaning.
      - Whenever possible, we should take words in the Bible at face value.
      - So, I prefer “all Israel” referring to every Israelite.
  - But that leads us to what Paul means when he says, “will be saved.”
    - Now, this might refer to physical deliverance when God rescues Israel in a future moment, but more likely it is “spiritual” salvation.
    - You can see that in the next verses when Paul says that a Deliverer “will banish ungodliness from Jacob” and “take away their sins.”
    - In other words, “will be saved” means “take away their sins.”
    - This speaks of the future, full salvation of the Israelite people, all of them.
    - Now, it seems best to understand this as a future time when the Deliverer, Jesus, comes down from heavenly Zion to save his people.
    - One day the partial hardening of the Jewish people will melt away and not just a few but all those Jews remaining in that day will be converted.
    - I describe this view as the “eschatological miracle” view.
      - When Jesus returns at the end of a time of severe persecution of the Jewish people, all ethnic Jews who survive will look to Jesus and be saved like the apostle Paul himself.
      - Paul used to reject Jesus and despise him, but then he saw him on the road to Damascus and immediately believed in him.
      - That is what will happen with “all Israel”—not every Jewish person from all time, but every living Jewish person at the time of the second coming of Jesus.

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<sup>260</sup> Steven Lawson, “Romans 11:23–27: The Future Salvation of Israel,” Bible study available on YouTube.

- Remember what Jesus said to hardened Israel when they rejected him in Matt 23:39—“I tell you, you will not see me again until you [plural] say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Every living Jew on that day will perceive that Jesus is the Messiah and will believe. And that will initiate the new covenant for them when God takes away their sins.

- **God’s salvation plan is supported by the OT (26b–27).** *As it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob;<sup>27</sup> and this will be my covenant with them” (Isa 59:20–21) “when I take away their sins” (Isa 27:9).*

So, God’s salvation plan is a mystery now revealed, and God’s plan involves three stages, but God’s plan is also supported by the OT. We can see this in the middle of verse 26 through 27. **Let’s look there.**

Here, Paul mixes two passages from Isaiah together to offer support for the salvation of the Jewish people. Look with me at this graphic which points it out.

But what led Paul to quote these two Isaiah texts?

- In a recent work, one author suggests that Paul draws from these two texts to use Isaiah’s “exile-restoration” framework.
  - Paul explains the present hardness and future salvation of Israel by imposing Isaiah’s message of exile from Isaiah 27 and restoration from Isaiah 59 respectively.
  - In Isaiah 27 specifically, Isaiah explains that future restoration will come “through” or “by means of” exile.
  - That is, Israel will first be exiled before it is restored.
- So, in my opinion, Paul adds, “When I take away their sins” from Isaiah 27 for two reasons.
  - First, Paul adds this phrase from Isaiah 27 to describe further the nature of the salvation that God will work for Israel.
    - This salvation is not entirely physical, but primarily spiritual.
    - In other words, when God delivers “all Israel,” he takes away their sin.
  - Second, Paul adds “when I take away their sins” to give emphasis to the present lost condition of Israel.
    - He has already explained that they are hardened in Romans 11.
    - Now, he says that they are in sins and need future deliverance!
- So, Paul appeals to Isaiah 59 to emphasize future deliverance for all Israel. He then adds Isaiah 27, while itself expressing a future salvation of Israel, to give a scriptural basis to explain why most contemporary Jews are now hardened. For Paul, the scriptures themselves teach that Israel goes through present exile before she will experience future restoration.

Now, let's look a little closer at the text here!

- The future salvation of all Israel will happen when “the Deliverer” or “Rescuer” will come.
  - Perhaps, you remember that Paul used this word in verb form near the end of Romans 7.
  - Paul asked, “Who can deliver us from the body of this death?”
  - Paul knows only one person can rescue or deliver us from sin—Jesus!
  - He is the only one then who should be called, “the Deliverer.”
- So, this Deliverer Jesus will come “from Zion.”
  - Now, this is part of the mysterious nature of God's plan that Paul reveals.
  - In Isaiah 59, the Deliverer comes “to” Zion—to the city of Jerusalem to help Israel.
  - Paul says it differently.
  - Some think he weaves yet another OT passage in here, but I do not think that is necessary!
  - Instead, a strong case can be made that Paul makes a deliberate shift to talk about Jesus coming down from heaven—the heavenly Zion to rescue his people.
  - In the NT, many times “Zion” refers to heaven (*see, for instance, Heb 12:22*).
- Now, let me show you this in an amazing (*and graphic!*) prophetic description of the OT prophet, Zechariah. **Look with me at Zechariah 14!**
  - In response to the political oppression and destruction of half of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, God promises that He will “strike all the peoples who wage war against Jerusalem.”
  - This passage bears testimony to Jesus's future intervention and then reign in Jerusalem after his coming!
- What Paul focuses on, however, is how Jesus delivers the remaining Jewish people from their sinfulness—the presence of sin in their lives.
  - He says, “This will be his covenant with them when he takes away their sins.”
  - This reminds us not only of what Isaiah prophesied, but also what his partners Jeremiah and Ezekiel said!
  - The covenant is the new covenant promised in such books, which includes the purging of the sinfulness of the people of Israel.

So, Jesus 1) returns (*he comes again*) and then 2) purges his people from their sins. That is, Jesus returns to purge Israel and then 3) rules over them as their Deliverer.

May this plan be driven deeply into our perspective and theology so that “we are not wise in our own eyes”—be wise in God's sight and astounded that God would hold off his plan for sinful people like us!

#### **b) The status of the Jews (28–32)**

In verses 28–32, Paul gives a final summary of the status of the Jewish people. He has been dealing with this for three chapters, now he brings it all together with the two statements found in verse 28. In other words, there are two ways that we should look at ethnic Israel today. We will consider this first before we explore the final passage of Romans 11 in our sermon today.

Now, these texts in Romans 11 function as far more than a reflection on the people of Israel. We will consider them one more time today, but in the process the text will demand that we spend more time focusing on God himself—our sovereign, powerful, and merciful God. Paul will explain some things to us about how God works and then lead us in worship of Him so that this ends with the greatest doxology of praise to the Father found anywhere in the Bible. Consequently, in our sermon today, we will see how this passage should inform our understanding of God and fuel our worship of Him.

So, let's begin by looking at the two final ways we should look at ethnic Israel today.

- **First, they are enemies of the Gospel (28a).** <sup>28</sup> *As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake.*

So, Paul's first summative statement concerning the Israelites is that they are currently enemies of the gospel. **Look with me at the beginning of verse 28.**

Paul has already referenced the gospel several times in the letter. The gospel is what Jesus offers to sinful humanity through his substitutionary death and resurrection. You might remember Rom 1:16 where Paul says that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.”

Now, when Paul says that the Israelite people are enemies, that likely concerns the fact that they are God's enemies. They have chosen to reject God's offer of salvation through the gospel of His Son, Jesus. So, Paul points out that this part of salvation history is “for your sake.” That is, God superintended their rejection of the gospel so that salvation could come to the Gentiles.

- **Second, they remain beloved on account of their forefathers (28b–32).**

That leads us to Paul's second summary statement about the Israelite people. In the middle of verse 28, we learn that regarding election, they remain beloved. **Look with me at the second half of verse 28.**

- **The Jewish situation (28b) –** *But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.*

Regarding God's choice or election, we should think of them as remaining beloved of God. God has not changed his mind regarding their special, chosen status. They remain this way because of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is not because of any special merits of those men, but because of the promises that God extended to them and their offspring.

- **Further explanations (29–32)**

Now, that is when Paul offers further explanations of their special status. **Look with me at the first word of verses 29, 30, and 32.** What is it? It is “for.” What we find here is Paul explaining things more. For the rest of the passage Paul explains why or how Israel remains beloved. Now, these verses relate three explanations.

- **First explanation (29)** – <sup>29</sup> *For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.*

The first explanation is found in verse 29. **Look there.**

Israel remains God’s beloved because God’s gifts and calling are unbreakable. Let’s take a moment to look at both of those things.

- **Gifts** (χαρίσματα) – At the very beginning of this section, Paul spoke about God’s gifts for Israel. More specifically, in 9:4–5, Paul says that they enjoyed eight advantages.
- **Calling** (κλήσις) – Now, I am even more convinced that Paul has that text in mind because of what follows in the rest of chapter 9. When considering whether God’s word has failed to the Israelites, Paul considers their calling and He who called them (cf. 9:7, 11, 25, 26).

No doubt Paul intends to bring the whole argument started in Romans 9 to a close. His greater point, however, is that God chooses, gifts, and calls in irrevocable ways. Once he chooses and gives in salvation history, He never takes back.

- **Second explanation (30–31)** – <sup>30</sup> *For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,* <sup>31</sup> *so they too have not been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.*

To this, Paul adds another explanation (vv. 30–31) about how God’s plans include showing everyone—both Jews and Gentiles—to be disobedient, allowing him to extend mercy to everyone. **Read verses 30–31.**

Paul begins this explanation by speaking of “our forefathers.” We have considered the “forefathers” of the Jewish people often in these chapters. Now, Paul has us look at our Gentile past. In verse 30, Paul looks at Gentiles in the era prior to Jesus (“*at one time*”; “*once*” [ποτε]).

- If you could go back to your forefathers—your genealogical tree—at the turn of the first Century AD, you would find people who were pagan.
- You might find people who worshipped Baal or Zeus or Marduk.
- You would find idolatrous people, who had no clue about the true God of the Bible.
- You would find people who drank blood.
- You would find immoral people.
- You would find coveting, cheating, blaspheming, murdering people.
- You would find people “disobedient to God” (ἡπειθήσατε τῷ θεῷ).

But Paul turns to “now” in the middle of verse 30. Although Gentiles were greatly disobedient, we have received “mercy” (ἐλεέω). And it continues in verse 31 that

God intends for the Jewish people to receive it as well. So, let's consider more about the word "mercy" that is used here.

- The word "mercy" could be translated compassion or pity.
- In the Bible, it always speaks of compassion on those in great need!
- The word speaks of someone lowly or pitiable who is extended kindness.
- The very first reference to "mercy" in the Bible in Genesis 33 (vv. 5, 11) illustrates this well!
  - In that situation, Jacob has deceived and run away from his brother, Esau.
  - In his encounter with Esau, Jacob declares that the family with him—his children, including the ones who God gave to his barren wife, Rebekah—were "compassionately" given to him by God.
  - What he has received from God is mercy to a lowly, sinful man!
- Now, Paul uses the word "mercy" only twelve times.
  - Four of those occurrences were in autobiographical declarations of Paul about how he was formerly lowly and sinful, yet God showed "mercy" to him.
  - Of the other eight occurrences of the term in Paul, seven are found in Romans 9–12.
  - So, if we are going to understand these chapters, we must get what "mercy" means! It is on Paul's mind in these chapters.
  - Consequently, Paul shows us that both Gentiles and Jews were sinful and lowly—in disobedience, pitiable—needing compassion or mercy.
- **Third explanation: a summary principle (32)** – <sup>32</sup> *For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

That is when Paul adds a third and final explanation in verse 32. This explanation functions as a summary principle. **Look with me at verse 32.**

If we are going to walk away from this chapters with a proper understanding, we have to understand some important things about God found in verse 32. In verse 32, the focus is on what God does with "all." By the word "all." Paul comments on humanity (*more specifically, both Jews and Gentiles*). That is, Paul speaks of both people groups here—the Jews and the nations.

So, what has God done to both Jews and Gentiles?

- **Well, first, God has "consigned" them "to disobedience."**

Now, I want to suggest that the word for "consigned" (συγκλείω) means "to confine or imprison."

- This word is only used in two passages by Paul.
- In Gal 3:22–23, Paul combines this word with another word—"held captive" (φρουρέω)—which speaks of being held in the captivity of prison.

- So, the word speaks of being imprisoned in disobedience.
  - That is Paul's metaphor.
  - He paints the picture of sinful men and women, boys and girls, in prison because of their disobedience to God.
  - In that kind of situation, we all know that we do not deserve anything but the prison cell.

Every person, whether Jewish or Gentile, is in a place, sealed up, locked down, with no hope of our own.

- **But then, at the end of verse 32, we learn that “He may have mercy” on them.**
  - When someone is incarcerated justly, yet delivered, only one word can be used for it—“mercy.”
  - In our kind of situation, only God can help us!
  - The “He” in verse 32b is so important!
  - Here we learn that God sees the pitiable situation of both Jews and Gentiles and so He shows his compassion on both!
  - So, that is how it is with God.
  - He is able and willing to show compassion to any sinner!
  - But what do we do with this? Let me suggest two applications!
    - **First, we should have enormous confidence in God.** God can look down on any imprisoned person and, in a moment, show compassion or pity on him and help him. No living person is beyond God's mercy. What God does for peoples—people groups—He can do for any person! He can show mercy toward your husband, your co-worker, your boss, your mother. That would be nothing for God. It would be light work! So, as we leave Romans 11, may we be greatly confident in God's ability to show mercy!
    - **Second, we should leave this chapter in worship.** When we remember that we were “imprisoned” in sin—sealed there by our own sins—then we should worship. When we remember that God showed compassion on us, we should pray, sing, and exult in God.

### 3. A doxology (11:33–36)

Ironically, that is where Paul goes in verses 33–36. All these things brought Paul to a place where he gives a powerful, theological doxology. Here we will see that Paul's secondary (*penultimate*) concern all along has been the salvation of Jew and Gentile. His primary (*ultimate*) concern is the glory of God.

So, Paul concludes with a majestic hymn of praise to God in one stanza. Stanza is a word that we are fairly familiar with. What a paragraph is to discourse, a stanza is to song! Now, stanzas are made up of strophes (*the smallest, complete thoughts of songs normally made up of three to seven words*). What sentences are in epistles, strophes are in songs.

Now, this song has three strophes—three complete, poetic thoughts. And there is amazing depth and balance to Paul's worship here. So, we will consider the three strophes that Paul uses to praise God.

- a. **Strophe 1: Three exclamations about God (33)** – <sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

It starts with three exclamations about God in verse 33. **Let's look there.**

As if the exclamations are not glorious enough, Paul starts with the particle “Oh” (ὦ). What do you hear in the word “Oh?” This is hard to define with words as Paul’s poetry here is meant to express not a concept but a feeling! This word adds to the stirring, emotional, assertions that Paul offers in worship to God in this passage.

- **The first exclamation is about God’s depths.**

While you can take this in different ways, I prefer “depths” to be addressing all three nouns which follow it—deep riches, deep wisdom, and deep knowledge. Paul has already spoken of the vast riches that God gives to his people in Jesus. The deep wisdom of God involves the way He operates in history and salvation. God’s knowledge, of course, speaks to his omniscience. He knows everything! So, when Paul thinks of God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge, one word comes to mind: “deep!” Paul realizes that we cannot plummet these depths fully to fathom the full extent of God’s being!

- **The second exclamation is about God’s judgments.**

Then he adds another exclamation about the judgments of God. Paul exclaims how unfathomable are the judgments that He executes.

- **The final exclamation is about God’s ways.**

And then he adds that God’s ways are untraceable. Humans are unable to untangle all God’s ways. Paul here echoes God’s majestic statements through the words of the prophet Isaiah. God says, “My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9).

- b. **Strophe 2: Three questions about God (34–35)** – <sup>34</sup> *For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?* <sup>35</sup> *Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?*

Now, in the next strophe, Paul’s reliance on the OT is more explicit. In verses 34 and 35, Paul quotes from Isaiah 40 and Job 41—two extremely important OT texts to move from exclamations to questions. **Let’s read verses 34 and 35 to see Paul’s three questions from those texts.**

- The two questions in verse 34 come from Isaiah 40.
  - In that chapter, Isaiah powerfully defends the transcendence—the loftiness—of God.
  - No human being can understand God enough to say that he knows His mind.
  - No human can know enough to be a counselor to God as well.
  - God is without counselors because He has perfect knowledge and discernment.
  - He not only does not need counselors, but no one qualifies as a counselor!
- God is not only without counselors, Job 41 tells us that He is without creditors too.

- In Job 41, “God tells Job that no one is able to make God his debtor because all creation belongs to him.”<sup>261</sup>
- God does not owe anyone anything.
- No one can make demands on him!

**c. Strophe 3: Three prepositions involving God (36) – <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.**

Having magnified God with exclamations and questions, Paul moves to whatever he has left—prepositions. In verse 36, Paul wraps up everything by applying three prepositions to God. **Look there with me.**

- No one can demand a gift from God because He is the source—the creator of all things. All things are “from” him.
- He is also the sustainer of all things (“through”), and the goal (*the final end*) of all things (“to”).

Now, Paul’s language here is to fully magnify God, so he slows things down by adding the word “and” again and again to get us to think more about them all.

- God is the creator ... and ... sustainer ... and ... goal of all things!

So, to God be the glory, forever. Amen. What a majestic doxology! What a powerful poem!

As we leave today, let’s remember that our experience of God’s compassion should compel us to worship! Maybe you are not much of a singer normally!

But, has God rescued you from prison? Were you shut up in your own lust and lies and greed and gossip?

- If so and if God has rescued you, sing & pray & rejoice & exult!
- How can you leave reflection for several weeks on such a great text in the Holy Scripture unaffected?
- How can you grasp the horrid nature of your own sins and the piercing, bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and not worship?
  - Worship privately throughout the week!
  - Worship corporately in the gathering!

In response to the message this morning and its powerful theological doxology, we are going to end the service in a different way.

- We are going to sing some hymn(s) of response to just enjoy worshipping God this morning!
- So, let’s stand and prepare.
  - We will take a moment to rejoice in silent prayer before we sing corporately this morning.
  - Let me invite the worship team to come forward to prepare for our closing!
  - After a brief moment of prayer, I will lead you in singing the doxology and then the worship team will lead us in two other songs!

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<sup>261</sup> Thielman, *Romans*, 554.

### III. The Pastoral Issue: You must be conformed to the gospel (12:1–15:13). *Conforming to the gospel includes:*

Today, we come to the next major section of the book of Romans. Paul has already revealed his theological issue for writing—he wants us to understand the gospel (Rom 1–11), and now he reveals his pastoral issue—he wants us to conform to the gospel (Rom 12–15).

- I really like Andy Naselli’s short statement about the transition from Romans 11 to 12.
- He says, “The final section of Romans before the conclusion [Rom 12–15] is not a footnote or appendix. The gospel is theological *and* practice.”<sup>262</sup>
- We have considered the mostly theological section in chapters 1–11; now, we move to the mostly practical section!

Within these four chapters, Paul describes what believers must do to conform their lives to the gospel and it has several significant parts.

- In chapter 12, Paul begins by showing that being conformed to the gospel requires personal (*individual*) and corporate “transformation.”
- He actually uses a word for “transformation” in verse 2, and I see that positive imperative as a key not only for the introduction to the chapter but for the whole thing!

#### A. Transformation (12:1–21)

Now, from my perspective, Paul reveals more about the nature of this transformation as involving us individually but also us in community with the church. Verses 1 and 2 are primarily about our personal sanctification, whereas, the remainder of the passage is more about our relationships (vv. 3–21). Paul’s vision for us in verse 12 is broad, involving both these things.

- In other words, Paul reveals that you cannot be everything God expects or wants from you unless you commit to two things:
  - 1) you must determine to continually being giving your body and your mind to God as a sacrifice, and
  - 2) you must commit to normal, regular participation in a community of faith—the church—that uses the Word, that rehearses the Word together, preaches *God’s* Word, prays through *God’s* Word together, sings it, studies it, pushing each other firmly and graciously to be transformed by *God’s* Spirit through the Word of God.

#### 1. Of lifestyle: Paul addresses our fundamental commitment to transformed living (1–2).

In Rom 12:1–2, Paul addresses the believer’s new life in two sentences. The first sentence involves our bodies (v. 1) and the second our minds (v. 2). We will take two weeks—two sermons—to look at this very important text. It is my prayerful anticipation that these two weeks—two sentences—might be some of the most important sermons we will ever hear. Therefore, we will not rush! We will pray and examine and commit.

##### a) Paul’s earnest appeal (1)

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<sup>262</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 153.

Let's begin with Paul's earnest request regarding our bodies in verse 1. **Look there with me.**

**1) The request (1a) – <sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, ... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.**

We begin with my first point—the request. Paul's opening words are strong. He “appeals to” them.

- Other translations take it as “urge, exhort, beseech, or plead with.”
- All these translations have a little different feel to them, and the text does not carry all these connotations, but these translations do communicate the serious nature of Paul's appeal.
- He “urges” believers to go after this!

Now, Paul's request is for the Roman believers to “present” their bodies as a sacrifice to God.

- The idea of God's people presenting a sacrifice to God is nothing new!
- It goes back to the beginning of time, after the Fall.
- The term “present” or “offer” is commonly used in the OT of offering animals to the Lord.
- In some cases, it is wheat, grain, or drinks to the Lord.

In Rom 12:1, however, Paul presents a unique offering.

- He calls believers to offer their “bodies” (τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν) as a sacrifice to the Lord.
- Why does Paul say “body” here?
  - He could have chosen other things—other words.
  - Well, it's God's wisdom.
  - It is almost as if He wrote this directly for our generation!
  - Paul tells us to give our whole being—all the components of being human.
- This is the only time in the whole Bible where people are told to offer their “bodies” to the Lord.
- A somewhat parallel passage is found in Romans 6 where Paul calls us to offer our “members” (“parts”) as an offering.
  - It says, “<sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present (“offer”) your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present (“offer”) yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”
- Now, technically, there was a human body that is mentioned in combination with sacrifice language in the Gospels (cf. Matt 26:12, 26).
  - That is right!
  - Jesus offered his “body” as a sacrifice on the cross for us!
- So, Paul calls believers to respond to the literal, physical sacrifice of Christ by giving our entire self metaphorically in service to God.

Now, many commentators state that the word “body” refers to our whole self.

- They rightly demonstrate that Paul is not just calling for our external being, but everything.
- So, this involves our bodies, but also our thoughts, feelings, dreams, etc.
- And that is true, but I do believe that the word “body” is intentional to put a primary focus on what we do with our bodies.
- And this important text confronts us and every generation with the need to devote not only our inward parts, but the ways we behave—how we use our bodies.

This sacrifice of our bodies is something that we should commit ourselves to repeatedly.

- One commentator says it this way, “This act of presenting yourself to God is not one specific act of dedication but a lifetime of dedication.”<sup>263</sup>
- As we journey through our life, Christians must commit to this new way—giving every part of us to God every day.

This sacrifice of our bodies is something that we should commit ourselves to fully as well.

- Some of us compartmentalize ourselves and then do not give over to God every room.
  - We do not give up every room.
  - We hold back one or two rooms, and we appease ourselves with what we have actually given God.
- Yet, in that one area, we let sin reign over us.
- We submit over and over to our own lusts and then walk around in hypocrisy, making people think that we are fully submitted to God.
  - We say, “Well, God really wants my heart! And He has my heart!”
  - That is true, but he also wants your body!
    - All of it!
    - All of you!
    - God is calling you to utter and complete devotion to Him.

Now, Paul gives us three further descriptions of this sacrifice. I prefer to keep the three descriptions together and probably to mention them in translation after the word “sacrifice” because that the word order in the original. The three words follow one another as descriptions of the way believers sacrifice their bodies to God. The sacrifice is “living” (ζῶσαν), “holy” (ἁγίαν), and “acceptable to God” (εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ).

- The word “living” is not intended to recall child or human sacrifice as much as it is to make the case that the sacrifice remains alive.
  - In Romans 6, Paul says that believers in Jesus have been made alive from the dead.
  - Consequently, we must give ourselves in our new life to God.
  - This speaks to the daily, practical way that we can live in obedience to God.

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<sup>263</sup> Naselli, *Romans*, 154.

- More specifically, we are a living sacrifice when through the Holy Spirit's enablement, we choose as a believer not to ...
  - 1) look on evil or immoral things with our eyes,
    - Are you looking at immoral things with your eyes?
    - What sites or reels are you looking at for self-centered, lustful, pleasure?
    - We must be careful and kill these things if we hope to be a bodily, living sacrifice to God.
  - You see, the battle in sanctification as a sacrifice is a holy war where God enables us to say "no" to sins of the body and we respond by refusing to submit again in slavery to the lust of our own eyes!
    - We cannot lazily, weakly, keep on looking at what our flesh dictates!
    - No, we need to rise up and say, "No!"
    - And have enough resolve that we include others (*if necessary; even in this!*) so that we engage in the war for our eyes!
  - Men and women, we live in a world of accessible, free, pornography, yet believers who present their bodies to God say, "No!"
  - Remember what Jesus said, "Everyone who looks out a women with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her" (Matt 5:28).
- 2) speak sinful things with our mouths,
  - Is your mouth—your tongue—out of control?
  - What gossip, slander, lies, or bitter words have you said this week?
  - Paul says, "Let no corrupt speech come out of your mouth" (Eph 4:29).
- 3) think illicit things in our minds,
  - Do you cultivate "sinful meditations" in your mind and excuse it because you think it does not affect others?
  - Paul says to present your body to God!
- 4) open our ears to those who oppose God,
  - Who do you listen to with your ears?
  - Be careful who we listen to!
  - We will talk more about this next week when we deal with—"Be not conformed to this age."
  - But let me just ask you now: Who has your ear?
    - We are often far more shaped by the world (*political commentators, influencers*) that we admit (*or maybe even realize*).
    - How much time do you give over to ungodly voices?
    - How much time do you give over to hearing from God, His Word, and believers?

- 5) use our hands and feet to do unrighteous things and go places you should not go.
  - The Bible says, “Turn your feet away from evil” (*Prov 4:27*), and “work with your own hands” (*1 Thess 4:11*).
- Now, we might object here and say well that is legalistic!
  - Well, let me respond to that and give an important disclaimer.
  - I want to stress again that what we are talking about here is not something we do to gain favor with God.
  - I also want to say two other things to believers:
    - First, sacrificing our bodies as living sacrifices is something we do in faith in response to Jesus’s sacrifice.
      - No one claims that Jesus’s bodily obedience to the point of death was legalism.
      - It was not!
      - He was simply doing what God asked him to do!
      - It is not wrong to respond to God’s grace and favor on him by doing what He says to do!
      - Instead, the truth is we do not like sermons about presenting our bodies as a sacrifice because we have seen bad forms of legalism in the church, or we have been influenced by our world to prefer license!
    - Second, no one would claim that Paul was being “legalistic” when he said, “I keep under my body, and I bring it into submission so that I do not become a castaway” (*1 Corinthians 9*).
      - If we were to ask Paul, “How serious should I take these things about indulgences of my eyes, ears, mouth?” “How much is too much?”
      - What do you think he would say?
        - He would say ... It’s a beautiful privilege to offer to God “self-control” in response to His Son who submitted himself to death on the cross!
        - He would say (*because he did*) ... “It is my eager expectation and hope that Christ would be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (*Phil 1:20*).
  - So, when, in faith and through the power of the Spirit, we offer our body—our eyes, mouths, minds, ears, and hands—to God, it can simply be obedience!
  - So, will you wake up tomorrow morning and love Christ this way, as a living sacrifice?
- The sacrifice of our bodies is also “holy.” Holy means that we are consecrated and set apart to God when we decide to present ourselves in service to God.
- Finally, the sacrifice is “well-pleasing to God.” This word is given emphasis by its mention here and again in the next verse. It is the only word repeated twice in this important passage and stresses how God see these things.

So, that is Paul's urgent request—"present your bodies to God as a sacrifice that is living and holy and well-pleasing to God." But there is more to learn.

## 2) The basis of the request (1b) – *by the mercies of God*.

Near the beginning of the verse, we find the basis of Paul's request in the phrase "by the mercies of God." So, this is our second point—the basis of the request.

- With this phrase, Paul is not mentioning the means or the instrument of his request.
- Instead, Paul is giving the source of his exhortation.
- Other translations might get this better when they suggest "because of" (TEV) or "in view of" (NIV).
- So, Paul says that the impetus for our willingness to live fundamentally committed to God is God's mercies.<sup>264</sup>

Now, when we consider the mercies of God, we need to reflect on God's mercy—pity or compassion—that was mentioned repeatedly (*nine times*) in Romans 9–11. John Stott says, "There is no greater incentive to holy living than contemplation of the mercies of God."<sup>265</sup> There could not be a more compelling motivation than to reflect on how God rescued us from the prison of our own sin and death.

## 3) The nature of the request (1c) – *which is your spiritual worship*.

So, we have learned about the request itself and its basis. Finally, we come to the nature of the request in the last phrase of verse 1. It says, "which is your spiritual worship." Presenting our bodies over to the Lord is our reasonable or appropriate response. The word comes from a root related to "logic." This is logical—rational—worship.

In other words, this is a positive description of what true or proper worship looks like.

We live in a world where people have all kinds of ideas about what genuine piety looks like in the flesh. They might boast in their asceticism or their extravagance. They might boast in their acts of service or compassion or their commitment to prayer and fasting. If you were to ask Paul, however, this is his response. Presenting all of what we are to God is our appropriate worship.

So, will you crawl up on the altar this week? Will you completely and daily sacrifice yourself to God this week?

- For some of you, I warn you with this text—Do not respond to preaching the way you normally do!
- Hear this significant text and commit to change by the power that God gives you through His Spirit!
- Do not be apathetic to this! Do not be lethargic this week! Put the video games and social media and T.V. aside for a bit and engage in the spiritual disciplines of sacrificing your body!
- That is our reasonable—rational—worship!

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<sup>264</sup> "Mercies" is plural because of Paul's reliance on the OT. In the LXX, the word is often plural in order to translate the Hebrew plural noun.

<sup>265</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 321.

## b) Paul's urgent commands (2)

Last week, we considered one of the most significant verses in the entire NT. We looked at Paul's earnest appeal to believers to present their bodies as a sacrifice that is living, holy, and acceptable as a form of reasonable, logical worship.

Today, we will consider Paul's urgent commands in verse 2. Both Paul's earnest appeal and his urgent commands in 12:1–2 have to do with our lifestyle and life choices. These two verses summarize how individual believers must commit to follow God. In the following verses, we will see that these individual commitments must also be met with communal commitments to our relationships with other believers in 12:3–21.

Now, in verse 1, Paul's emphasis is on our bodies, and I hope you spent last week really declaring to God daily that your whole body is his. In verse 2, Paul has a different focus. His concern here is our mind. In this verse, we will learn that Paul wants the Spirit to transform the Romans believers' whole mindset so that they discover and do God's will.

So, in our sermon today, I want you to see how your values and mindset must be transformed by the Spirit. Please listen today with outmost attention! Do not get distracted! I said last week that these two sermons are most significant for the health of our church!

### 1) The commands (2a) – <sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.*

So, let's begin with the actual commands that Paul gives right at the beginning of verse 2. **Read v. 2a.**

- **1<sup>st</sup> Command: Do not be conformed to this age.**

Now, to start with this first command, we have to know what Paul means by two words: “conformed” and “world.” Let's begin with the second word.

- The word for “world” is a word that can literally be translated “age.”
  - This word normally refers to an age or era, including the major forces or powers of that era that shape values and conduct.
  - That is, “age” can refer to values and systems of this world at a particular point in time.
  - But let's look more deeply at this important word in Scripture.
  - I want to observe three things with you here.
- First, it is very important to realize that both Jesus's and Paul's worldview was made up of two ages—1) this present age and 2) the age to come. We will consider the following verses from Paul and Jesus.

- In Jesus, we can see this in places like Matt 13:49–50, 28:20, and Mark 10:30.

*Matt 13:49–50- So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.*

*Matt 28:20- Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

*Mark 10:30- Who will not receive a hundredfold, now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.*

In these verses and others like them, Jesus explains that he will be with his disciples through the Spirit until the end of this age and that this age will continue until the great, future judgment when the unrighteous are thrown into the fiery furnace. In Mark, Jesus explains a general principle about those who leave their parents and homelands to follow him. They will receive things in this life with persecutions, but in the age to come they will get eternal life. You see, Jesus had this age and then the next in his worldview.

- In Paul, we can see this in places like Eph 1:21 and 1 Cor 10:11.

*Eph 1:21- Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

*1 Cor 10:11- Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.*

In Ephesians, God set Jesus up as a ruler above all rulers and powers in this age and the age to come. Jesus will reign over all through both ages. In 1 Corinthians, Paul portrays believers as living at the transition—the ends—between two ages—the present age and the one to come. The end of the present age has come and the beginning of the age to come is here!

- Next, we must consider how Paul and Jesus perceived the fundamental nature of this present age. Let me describe this present age with a few important texts (*I could do more, but you will get the point!*).
  - First, and most importantly, Paul describes this present age as evil.
    - Gal 1:3–4a say, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present, evil age.”
    - So, Paul does not see the values and systems of this present age as being neutral.
    - He is not indifferent to the perspectives of current society or the non-Christian world.
    - No, he says that this present age is evil.
  - Second, Paul explains that Satan is the god of this present age.
    - 2 Cor 4:4 says, “In their case, the god of this world [‘age’] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
    - So, Satan is not inactive in this age.
    - No, he’s the god over it, blinding unbelievers today.
  - Third, Paul explains that the rulers of this present age are often ignorant.

- In 1 Cor 2:7–8 it says, “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”
  - Now, Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 2 is not that we can disregard our governmental rulers *cart blanc*, but that the best of the human leaders in the day of Jesus did not understand God’s wisdom or they would not have crucified Jesus.
  - It should not surprise, however, to discover that the rulers of this present, evil age are often being deceived by Satan to oppose God and his ways.
- Finally, let’s consider what Paul and Jesus say about us and this present age. Believers are citizens of both ages. We are to live for the age to come in our present age. Again, we could do a lot here, but I will limit myself to one passage from Jesus and another from Paul.
- In Mark 4:19, Jesus describes the way different people respond to the Word with a parable of seed and soils.
    - Now, when he explains what he means by seeds being sown among thorny soil, he says this: “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world [‘age’) and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”
    - Here, Jesus describes people who might think that they are believers and who respond initially to the Word positively, but over time the “cares of this age” choke out the Word, so they become completely unfruitful.
  - But probably one of my favorite passages in Paul on this subject is perhaps even more penetrating.
    - Listen to what Paul says about us and this age in 1 Cor 3:18: “Let no man deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this age is foolishness with God.”
    - Do you hear Paul’s piercing warning?
    - If you think you are well astute, well aware—of the values and mindsets of this present age—you should throw it away—become a fool to it—so that you may actually be wise.

Now, Paul’s first command in Romans 1 says it a little different way. Paul says that we must not “be conformed” to this age.

- This is likely best understood as a passive verb—Do not let “this age” press itself down on you. Do not let it form or mold you!
  - That is, we must not take this age—or the rulers, leaders, influencers of this age—as our pattern for behavior.
- You see, our secular world has many values that they press down on us that are against Scripture.
- One such value in our cultural moment involves sexuality and gender.

- This month is one that our executive administration has marked out as a time not only to accept various forms of sexual perversion but to celebrate it.
- Yet, the Bible is clear in its denouncement of the abomination of homosexuality and others forms of sexual diversity.
- God created sex to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in marriage. Other things are immoral.
  - Our culture says, “Celebrate,” but the Bible says, “Preach the Gospel; Preach repentance” to those who reject God’s way.
- Our culture forces its views on women’s rights regarding their bodies, including life in the womb.
- Our culture prevails its views of race and diversity and manhood and womanhood.
- Our culture crafts songs and movies to soften our views on sex before marriage, yet God thinks very differently about it.
- Ads and commercials put forward these same sinful agendas. Even fixer-upper shows do it!
- Overall, we must see that our culture is not neutral.
- Our leaders are not indifferent to the way we think!
- I think one of the best ways to understand these things is to see that we are all inevitably serving one of two masters—this age or Christ.
- The real question is to what pattern or standard will you conform.

Perhaps, all this has been a little shocking to you! Good! It should not surprise us to realize that the god of this age—Satan—is working overtime to put us under subtle, yet constant, pressure to submit to the attitudes and values of this present age.

As a point of direct application this morning, I call on you all to evaluate the sources that you allow to shape your life.

- Let me ask you—Are you more influenced by secular commentators and influencers and celebrities and performers than you are scripture?
- Just simply look at how much you hear and watch.
- Look at your social media and music.
- Whose voices are you listening to? Who has your ear? Who is shaping your values?
  - This does not mean that every unbeliever always gets it wrong.
  - They can occasionally portray true wisdom from God.
  - But, in light of Rom 12:2, we should be very, very careful.
- Do you listen more to secular sources and those who value current society for 1) what you do, 2) how you behave, 3) what you value, and 4) how you look, or do you go to mature, godly believers for counsel and perspective?

Do not be conformed to this age! Do not let this age press down on you and mold you into its image, forcing its values on you! You know the old hymn *Am I a Soldier of the Cross* asks a great question: “Is this vile world a friend to grace—to help me on to God?”

- **2<sup>nd</sup> Command: Be transformed.**

But that is not all! Next, Paul says that we should positively “be transformed.” Now, this is also passive. We allow God to transform us!

- This rare word is used in the gospels of God changing Jesus at his transformation. He was changed into a glorious being!
- But this rare word is also used in 2 Cor 3:18 of the way that God transforms believers through the Holy Spirit.

So, instead of allowing this age to press its mold on us, we should allow the Spirit to mold and shape us!

## 2) **The means of obeying these commands (2b) – *By the renewal of your mind.***

So, those are the two commands—do not be conformed by this age but be transformed. Now, that leads to a question: How are we supposed to be transformed? Well, the answer to that comes in the next part of the verse—“by the renewal of your mind” (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς). But what does that mean? How do I get a renewed mind?

- Well, we begin by showing that these verses clearly portray Paul’s concern for who will control the minds of believers.
- Will it be those of this present, evil age or will it be God?
  - Now, to answer the question a bit more clearly, I think it is so helpful to know that Paul uses the word for “renewal” in its noun form in only one other passage and that passage offers more commentary on how this renewal works.
  - **Look with me at Titus 3:5–6.**
    - It says, “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”
    - In this passage, our renewal at conversion is explicitly linked to something the Holy Spirit does to us!
    - The Spirit is also the agent in 2 Corinthians 3 (“*the Lord who is the Spirit*”).
    - So, the renewal of our minds takes place in our lives as the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to inform our minds and our life’s values.
- Now, Paul uses the verb form of “renewal” in a different passage with the word “mind.”
  - In Eph 4:23, Paul says that we are “to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.”
  - This is the middle step between putting off the old self and putting on the new self.
  - But what does the “spirit of our mind” mean?
    - Paul does not say, “Be renewed in our mind,” but “be renewed in the spirit of our mind.”
    - What does that mean?
    - Well, it’s hard to relate in English, but it’s something like our mind’s disposition, bent, or attitude.
    - The NIV translates, “to be made new in the attitudes of our mind.”
    - This portrays the mind as having its own attitude or mindset.

- The “spirit of our mind” is our whole way of thinking—our fundamental ways of thinking.

So, Paul wants the Spirit of God to transform us as we behold God’s glory in the Word of God.

So, I ask—How much time do you give to secular voices verses God’s voice in His Word?

- I mean, be honest here (“*Do not deceive yourself*”)!
  - Do you just get your little morsel from the Bible in the morning and then open up the floodgates to secular wisdom—I mean secular foolishness?
  - Do you even like Bible study and Bible studies?
  - Do you make it a point to get in them so that you hear God’s wisdom.
  - If I had you turn to the person on your left and then on your right and explain what God taught you in his Word this week, would you have things to say or would you just have to make something up?

God changes us through the Spirit renewing our minds through the Word of God. Oh, please, do not let the cares of this age choke out the Word of God in your life!

I am concerned for many professing believers in this world—some in our church—who have “no pulse”—no fruit, no desire for God’s Word. Membership will not save you.

**3) The goal of obeying these commands (2c) – *that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

Finally, Paul ends with the goal of obeying these commands in the final part of verse 2. ***Read it.***

Paul is not just all about rules! He gives this command for the express purpose that we might be able to discover what God really wants. He calls us to obey so that we might love what God loves and do what God does. He wants us to perform God’s good, well-pleasing, and perfect will.

Under the old covenant, the Israelites could not please God. Now, He puts his Spirit in us so that our whole body and our mindset can be pleasing to Him! Let’s examine ourselves today!

**2. Of relationships: Paul addresses our fundamental commitment to proper relationships (3–21).**

In Rom 12:3, Paul turns from discussing what God expects out of us in our lifestyle to what he expects from us in relationships.

- In Rom 12:1–2, Paul called believers to live transformed lives in response to the mercy and grace of God to us in Christ.
- More specifically, God calls us not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind so that we might be able to do God’s will.
- Now, he explains more (*cf. “for”*) about what that looks like in our commitments and in our relationships.
  - When we became believers, we came into relationship with Jesus, but not only with him.
  - When we become in Christ, we came into relationship with brothers and sisters in Jesus.
  - That relationship with our brothers and sisters is where Paul goes next in the text.

It is at this point where Paul accomplishes two things.

- First, he tells us more about how our minds can be transformed by the Spirit (v. 2).
  - If you look in verse 3, notice that he keeps using the word “think” to articulate the most basic way that our minds are made new (*read* v. 3).
  - That is what the first half of this paragraph is about (vv. 3–6a)—thinking!
- Second, we also realize that being everything that God desires of us includes far more than personal, private, individual faith and growth.
  - Being everything God desires or requires of us includes genuine, dogged, commitment to demonstrate His grace to others in the church.
  - That is what Paul moves to in the second half of the paragraph (vv. 6b–8).

To put the whole argument together, Paul knows that thinking rightly about ourselves compels us to use our gifts in the body of Christ.

- So, in this sermon, I have one simple goal—one prayerful goal.
- I want you to think rightly about yourself so that you are compelled to serve your brothers and sisters in the church!
  - I am convinced that many professing believers are failing to please God in a way that they are often ignorant to.
  - They are omitting something important!
- So, this sermon will address the subtle, well-accepted failure of modern believers.
  - This failure—this omission—does not just hit young people.
  - Sometimes the elderly are just as prone to this failure.
- So, fasten your safety belts and consider with me the subtle, well-accepted blind spot & failure of many modern believers.

#### **a) Thinking rightly about ourselves in relation to our gifts (3–8)**

Now, in my opinion, verses 3 through 8 have two parts to it: 1) the call to think (vv. 3–6a) and 2) the guidelines to use our gifts in the church (vv. 6b–8).

##### **1) The call to think (3–6a)**

The important call itself is found in verse 3. ***Let’s look there.***

- **The call itself (3)** – <sup>3</sup> *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of the faith that God has assigned.*

If we want to “renew our mind,” where would we begin?

Well, Paul begins by calling believers to think properly about themselves. He states this negatively then positively to make his point clear.

- Upon the authority of his call as an apostle, Paul calls every believer “not to think too highly of himself.”
  - Because of our sin nature, we tend to prioritize ourselves and our own views on things.
  - When it comes to evaluating what we should do, we prefer our own perspectives.
  - Church splits are often fueled by this! We think that our way must be right!
  - But it is important for Paul for us to think humbly about ourselves.
  - Paul has been hitting this same theme hard in recent chapters.
  - As a matter of fact, three times in Romans 11 alone, he calls Roman believers to humility.

*11:18 – Do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.*

*11:20 – That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.*

*11:25 – Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers.*

- Then, he will return to it later in chapter 12.

*12:16 – Never be wise in our own sight.*

- Instead of having too high a view of ourselves, Paul says, we should “think with sober judgment.” But what does sober judgment of ourselves mean?
  - This means that we should not think too highly, but we should evaluate ourselves sensibly or soundly. But what is a proper evaluation of ourselves?
  - Now, this does not mean that we always degrade ourselves and think of ourselves as the lowliest.
  - No, we should exercise sound judgment in these matters. But how do we know if our view of ourselves is sound?

Well, the text answers that, albeit with a different little phrase. Read verse 3 again and emphasize the last phrase.

This last line has perplexed me. Paul says that the standard or measure by which we judge ourselves is “in accordance with the measure (*or quantity*) of faith (*or trust*) that God has given to him.”

- So, that measurement or standard should I use for my self-assessment?
- The answer is “the faith that God has assigned to me.”
- I have spent much of the last three days trying to figure this out and I want to make it as clear as I can for you so that you can obey it.
- The NLT translation helps capture the sense.
- It says, “measuring ourselves by the faith God has given to us.”

- Each believer in Jesus possesses a certain quantity of faith (*or trust*) and our self-assessment should be according to the measure of faith that we have.
  - Perhaps, you have seen someone rise up to minister to someone else at an important time in their life—maybe in the hospital after they lose someone.
  - And it becomes obvious in that moment that your ministering brother or sister has great faith (*a profound fervency and depth to his or her faith*).
  - So, their encouragement reverberates because of the deep faith that God has worked in his or her life.
- Interestingly, this is something that God assigns believers in this passage. Now, the word “assigns” might also be translated “divides out” or “distributes.” God apportions out this faith as He sees fit.
- It is also true, however, that we have seen earlier in Romans that it is possible for even elderly believers to grow in their faith.
  - Perhaps, you remember that Romans 4 is about faith.
  - Over and over again, Paul keeps using the word to describe the faith of Abraham.
  - **Let’s consider Rom 4:19–20.**

*4:19–20 – He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.*

- In that passage, we see that it is possible for believers to gain more faith! Abraham did so as he 1) refused to be discouraged by externals and 2) committed to give all glory to God.

That is a blessed assurance that should draw our efforts and prayers to the one who apportions out faith. Back in our text, however, we learn that we should measure ourselves honestly and soberly according to the faith that we have from God. None of us should be proud because we stand in our own strength. No, we stand in the faith which God has given to us!

We think rightly of ourselves when we measure ourselves not according to our own gifts and talents, but according to the faith that God has given to us.

- **The basis for the call (4–6a)**

Now, Paul moves next to the basis of his call to sober self-evaluation. Paul calls us all to view ourselves humbly because two things are foundationally true.

- **Basis #1: Be humble because ... the church includes many members performing different functions in unity (4–5).** <sup>4</sup> *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,* <sup>5</sup> *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

First, we should be humble because the church includes many members performing different functions in unity. **Let’s look at what Paul says in verses 4 and 5.**

Paul uses one of his favorite analogies here.

- The analogy is of the body and body parts. Just as a body needs many unique body parts to function properly, so the church involves many unique members using their gifts.
- We should remain humble because God uses all our brothers and sisters to accomplish his multi-faceted purposes.

One interesting observation is that Paul returns to the word “body” (*soma*) in verse 4. In verse 1, we learned that God desires our bodies to be living sacrifices to him. That spoke of our physical bodies. Now, we learn that we must give of ourselves for the health of the corporate body—the church. Both are necessary—your physical body and your commitment to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

- **Basis #2: Be humble because ... our gifts come from God’s grace to us (6a).** <sup>6</sup> *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.*

Then Paul gives another basis for his call to honest self-assessment. ***Look with me at verse 6a.***

Now, the translation that we read is good, but I would prefer for it to have the word “and” at the beginning because the Greek text has a conjunction at the beginning of the verse. The word “and” would tip us off to the fact that this is a second basis. We should be humble because ... our gifts come from God’s grace to us.

The focus of verse 6a is that our gifts differ in relation to the grace given to us.

- What some English readers might not know is that the words for “gifts” and “grace” are related to each other.
- Listen to this: The word “gift” is *charisma* and “grace” is *charis*.
- In other words, grace is the root or source of the gifts and gifts are the practical, concrete demonstrations of God’s grace to us.

Now, you probably have all kinds of questions about spiritual gifts that I will just not be able to answer today! We will return to the end of this text (*especially verses 6b–8 and the list of gifts there*) and compare it to other texts about gifts in 1 Cor 12–14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 the next time that we are together (*the 4 NT texts!*).

Today, we just need to see why Paul draws our attention to our gifts in verse 6.

- This verse gives us a reason to humbly assess ourselves.
- We should do so because all our gifts come directly from grace—God’s grace to us!
- God is the one who equips believers in the church.
- We have nothing inherently—in ourselves—that we can offer to please God.

But in the middle of verse 6, we can see how Paul turns our attention from not highly exalting ourselves to humbly serving in the church of God. In the middle of the verse, do not miss the words “let us use them.”

- You see, the gifts that God has given to you, he’s actually given to us—the church.

- Earlier in the text (v. 4), in the body metaphor, he says, “we have many members.”
  - Who has many members?
  - The answer is “we.”
  - We—the church—are members of one another.
  - In other words, because of my new relationships in Jesus, the church has—owns—my gifts.

- You see, God equips you so that you would *use* them in the context of the church.

Paul not only wants us to honestly assess ourselves in relation to the faith that God has given us, he calls us to use any gifts that God has given us in the church. God not only wants us to commit our life or our body to him, He wants us to commit to use our gifts to help our brothers and sisters in the church. You cannot be everything that God wants you to be unless you use your gifts in the church.

It is easy to think improperly about this—to think the way that people in our own age and time think about church.

- How do you think about yourself?
- How do you view your relationship to others in this local body?
- Do you prize your independence, or do you sense your interdependence with your brothers and sisters here?
- How do you view your role in the church?
  - It is very easy, in this age, to think very lowly about the church.
  - It is easy to think that the church is just not that important!
    - You may have learned that the church is not very important from your parents who only attended church on Sunday mornings and felt that they had fulfilled their whole obligation.
    - You may have learned this from your peers who go occasionally to church gatherings on Sunday mornings when they wake up in time and then feel that they have fulfilled their Christian obligation!
    - Or you may do this because of your own tendency to follow the spirit of this age by cocooning yourself.
    - Might I call anyone who is watching the video of this sermon to genuinely, prayerfully evaluate whether you really should be “doing church” at home.
      - I recognize that some rare health issues prevent believers from gatherings (*caring for loved ones especially! I can think of many of those, and you are in my prayers*).
      - But, if you are able to go to malls and flea markets and restaurants and community events and school board meetings, but not church gatherings, I ask you: “How are you using your gifts in the church?”

You know there is a lot that you can give yourself to in life. To what will you give yourself?

- Some people will do so for their career or their business.

- They labor long and hard hours over the years to serve the company.
- Others give themselves to their ministry outside the church.
- For years, I served at a Bible College and Christian camp.
  - They were tremendous years at a special place, and it was a high calling to train “the next generation of servant leaders for Great Commission living” as we served churches.
- But, in those years, I observed many co-workers who treated that as their ministry and then were unfaithful to church.
  - They did not go.
  - They did not invest.
  - They were mysteriously absent.
  - But one day, I read Ephesians, specifically chapter 3.
    - In that chapter, Paul explains that God displays His manifold wisdom to the cosmos—to creation—even angelic powers—through the church (3:10).
    - That is, there is a great cosmic play occurring, where God is helping angels understand his profound wisdom, and the characters in the play are the church.
- Texts like this tell me that the church demands my primary (*not exclusive*) loyalty.
- So, I decided to invert my focus and efforts to give as much as I could to my church—in Michigan, then Minnesota, then Virginia.
- I determined to be a champion of the church, and this text has reminded me and rebuked me of my passive, silent approach to believers who dismiss the importance of the church!
- Will you join me in this determination?
  - I do not say this selfishly so that you will give more of yourself to this church!
  - I say it in love so that you can become everything that God desires of you!
    - I do not desire to guilt you!
    - I desire to build you!
  - Some of you might not have thought much about this before!
  - Some may simply be distracted!
    - Please take this as a gracious, yet fervent word from the Lord to use your gifts in the church!
- Others give themselves to their school and arrange their entire schedule around their friends at school.
- But, in this text, Paul wants believers to use their gifts—whether prophecy, teaching, serving, showing mercy, etc.—in the church.

As we close, I want to lift up a good example for you. I talked with a brother at our Wednesday Summer Bible Series, and he told me why he comes. He said, “I want to use my gifts to encourage these young men who feel called to preaching.”

- He does not feel compelled to preach himself right now, but he wants to encourage the preachers.
  - So, last week, he worked hard all day long.
  - Rushed home.
  - Took a shower.
  - Skipped dinner.
  - Just so he could come and use his gifts to encourage the young preachers.
- And, may I also say, God used him!
  - I personally observed him speaking to the preacher and thanking him for a way that the preacher pointed people to the gospel, and I heard the preacher say that he would intend to use the gospel to encourage people like that in other sermons!

So, is this how you see yourself—humbly, in relation to the faith and gifts that God has given you, and is this how you view the use of your gifts? Is this how you see the church?

- Thinking soberly about ourselves will compel us to serve others in the body of Christ with the gifts and faith that God has given to us!
- Thinking rightly about ourselves shows our need to be inter-dependent with our brothers and sisters.

## 2) The guidelines to use our gifts in the church (6b–8)

Well, it has been some time since we were in Romans together! I thought that it might be important to review a few important things about the book, the chapter before we just plunge right back in.

- First, let’s remember that Paul had some important reasons for writing this book. We have tried to emphasize three large movements in the main body of Romans as they appear. If you can count to three, then you can keep the big picture of Romas in mind.
  1. **The Theological Issue:** We must *understand* the gospel (1:18–11:36). We must understand its nature, power, and history.
  2. **The Pastoral Issue:** We must *be conformed to* the gospel (12:1–15:13).
  3. **The Missiological Purpose:** We must *understand* and *be conformed to* the gospel, so we can participate in reaching unbelievers in Spain with it (15:14–33).

If you keep these three big pieces together, then you will remember the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans.

- So, at the beginning of Romans 12, Paul is explaining some of the most important pastoral burdens that he has for the Romans.

- For believers to be everything God wants them to be, they have to give their bodies and minds to him as a living sacrifice (vv. 1–2). Instead of conforming to this present (evil!) age, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds to discern God’s perfect will.
- But being everything God wants us to be involves more than our physical bodies, it also includes our commitment to the body of Christ—the church (v. 4; from “bodies” to “body”). Paul wants us to think humbly—soberly—about ourselves so we use the gifts God’s given us to build our brothers and sisters in the church.

The last time that we looked at Romans, we considered verses 3–6a, and I pushed pretty hard against a blind spot in our American Christianity.

- We think that if we are individually devoted to God that that is enough; instead, Paul says that we must use our gifts in the church to build others.
- Our gifts are property of the church!
- If we are not champions of the church—if we are not committed to using our gifts in the church, then we are not right with God!

This week, we will see this by looking at the final verses of this paragraph (vv. 6b–8), and, perhaps, answer some questions that you have about “spiritual gifts”—those enablements that the Holy Spirit distributes to believers.

Now, to be fair, we will not answer all your questions. To do so, we would have to pause this series in Romans and look at the other passages that mention them as well (*1 Corinthians 12–14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4*). Our passage contains seven gifts, but in total, there are either 18 or 19 (*depending on how you are counting!*) listed in all these passages. I did produce the full list for you in your handout. These gifts represent some of the ways that God gifts believers to serve others in the church.

Now, when I came out of seminary, studies of spiritual gifts were very popular. Perhaps, too popular!

- For every one study on the “fruit” of the Spirit, you could find ten on the “gifts” of the Spirit.
- Spiritual gift tests were running amuck!
- Now, we should be careful with these studies because we can get too self-focused to learn more about our favorite person—“myself.”
  - Do not be like the fleshly Corinthian believers who were really into gifts, but not so much on fruit.
  - Remember that in 1 Corinthians 12 after Paul does say to “covet earnestly the best spiritual gifts”, he says that he would show them a more excellent way—love.
- These studies are also often very subjective, where authors speculate excessively about the gifts; instead, we should study what the Bible actually says about the gifts!

So, let’s dig in to see what Romans 12 says. **Look with me at verses 6–8.**

- *Prophecies (6b) – If prophecy, in proportion to our faith.*

Paul starts in this passage with “prophecy” (προφητεῖαν). He says, “If prophecy, in proportion to our faith.”

Now, none of the gifts in this list are really controversial *except* this first one! So, we will have to take some time to work through this one! We will take about half our time on this one gift!

To be clear, I want to answer a few questions that will help you better understand prophecy.

Now, not every person will agree with some of the conclusions that I have come to about prophecy.

- Good Christian brothers often disagree about this!
- Behind what I am going to cover today are about 20 or 30 exegetical and theological calculations.
- Prophecy is a vast subject that runs through both testaments in your Bible and pulling it all together requires great diligence.
- At the end of the day, you might not agree with me on this and let me just tell you—it is OK for you to be wrong in this one area 😊 !

So, let's consider three questions before we look closely at Paul's instructions about using this gift:

- **First, what is prophecy?**

The gift of prophecy is the supernatural ability to speak inerrant, authoritative words directly from God.

- Now, these words could contain information from God about the past, present, or even the future.
  - Sometimes, God informed prophets about what people did privately in the past (*Do you remember Nathan with David—"you are the man!"—or Samuel with King Saul—"What then is this bleating of the sheep?"*).
  - Many times, however, prophets were told things from God about the future as well (*see the Major & Minor Prophets and select NT passages*). We will consider one of those NT texts in a little while!
- So, prophecy could involve insider information about the past, present, or future!
- Further, prophecy was a message that revealed "the word of the Lord" (*"thus says the Lord"; "declares the Lord"*) to others often concerning sin, the heart, righteousness, and judgment.
- Still further, prophecy involved the reception and transmission of new revelation from God. You say, what text makes you think that? I say, almost all of them!
- Prophets were regularly imparting new words from God to the people to whom they were ministering!
- Prophets were "channels of" or "vehicles of" divine revelation. God gave them revelation to communicate!
  - This distinction is important to me!
  - In this way, then, prophecy is different from other gifts that worked with already, given, written revelation (*i.e., teaching, exhortation*).
  - Teaching and exhortation, for instance, worked with existing texts of scripture!

- Prophecy gave new revelation.<sup>266</sup>
  - I mean, teaching and exhortation are listed as separate, unique gifts even in this short list here in Romans.
  - There can be some overlap, but there is enough of a distinction between them that Paul could list them out as separate gifts (*he does the same with “preaching” as well, which also worked primarily with revelation that had already been written*).

Now, I could take you to host of OT and NT passages that demonstrate that prophecy was a supernatural ability to speak inerrant, authoritative words directly from God. I encourage you to run this definition by the Scripture this week to see if you agree that it involved new revelation from God about sin, the heart, judgment, and the past, present, and future of God’s people.

That is what prophecy is.

- **Second, in the NT, who could prophecy?**

The next question is: In the NT, who could prophecy?

The answer to this question is those whom God informed. More specifically, in the NT, this was normally believers—both men and women (*remember 1) the four, unmarried daughters of Philip [Acts 21:9]; and 2) the women in the church prophesying with heads covered in 1 Corinthians 11*).

These gifted men and women conveyed God’s words—new revelation—in the church to exalt God and to build believers.

- **Third, can people still prophecy?**

So, we have considered what prophecy was and who could prophecy, but how about now? That is the final question: Who can prophesy today? Well, that is a tough question! It depends on who you ask!

- There are some popular answers to this question among Christians that I should mention before I tell you what I think is best. We cannot consider every view, but these are views that some of you—maybe many of you—hold!
  - First, a very popular theologian, Wayne Grudem, wrote his doctoral dissertation on prophecy and later published a popular book about prophecy. His ideas have been very influential, impacting other writers like D. A. Carson and Sam Storms. His basic belief is that there were two levels of prophecy or prophets in the NT era.
    - You might think of them as “capital P” prophets and “lowercase p” prophets.

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<sup>266</sup> Schreiner agrees with this distinction between prophecy and teaching. He writes, “The gift of teaching differs from prophecy in that it depends on an explanation of tradition that is already written, whether that tradition was the OT Scriptures, the words and works of Jesus, or catechetical material.” Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 658.

- “Capital P” prophets are prophets who served with the Apostles to establish the church. They gave inspired, inerrant, authoritative revelation from God.
  - “Lowercase p” prophets, according to Grudem, could err and must be evaluated or scrutinized.
  - More specifically, to our third question, he says that only “lowercase p” prophecy remains today.
- But this distinction is not made in the NT.
  - All genuine prophecy was authoritative and inerrant.
  - Believers in both the Old and New Testaments were to evaluate all prophecies and, if it was proven false, you knew that this person did not speak for God.
  - They were false prophets that must be rejected!
- Second, another popular way of understanding the gift of prophecy is to say that it involved “foretelling” (*predictions of the future*) and “forthtelling” (*proclamations from God regarding sin, the heart, etc.*)—telling forth God’s word!
  - Some people related to Masters Seminary, for instance, teach this (*Robert Thomas, Steven Lawson*).
  - I think those categories *can be* helpful, although the word “forthtelling” is probably not as well understood in contemporary English as it was years ago!
  - Once they make this distinction, some say that only the “forthtelling” of God’s will and Word continue.
  - The “foretelling”—predictions of the future—they do not believe to continue.
  - The problems, however, are that 1) this distinction—this categorization—is not found explicitly (*or even implicitly*) in the Bible and 2) that no passage in the Bible says that the “foretelling” part of prophecy no longer continues.
- It seems much better to me to say that the gift of prophecy either continues in any of its manifestations today *or* that it “has passed away.” Now, that is when we have to consider a passage in the Bible—1 Corinthians 13—which explicitly says that prophecy “will pass away” like the gift of tongues “will cease” when maturity comes! I have already preached that passage to this church, though, so you can go online to hear my explanations and arguments in the 1 Corinthians series.

It is my suggestion to you then to consider prophecy as a supernatural ability to speak inerrant, authoritative words directly from God—a gift that no longer genuinely exists in the church.

- I will not take the time to give reasons why such a gift of new, inerrant, authoritative revelation is no longer necessary.
- Let me just say that I do love to talk about those things, especially over coffee that is your treat!

Now, you might hold one of these other views and talk about someone being prophetic in the way that they call out someone or deal with sin!

- I would probably just explain it as some other gift, maybe something like “exhortation” (what an “exhorter!”) that we will talk about in just a few moments!

So, let’s return to this text! Paul gives instructions to these early believers in Rome to prophesy in a particular way. Do you see it? Look at the very end of verse 6. They are to do so “in proportion to our faith” (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν<sup>267</sup> τῆς πίστεως). But what does that mean? Well, there are really two choices:

- Some take the faith here to be a reference to the faith—the Christian faith. So, they see Paul saying that prophecy should conform to the “standard of” the Christian faith (CSB; *Cranfield*). The Christian must speak in a way that agrees with the standard of Christian doctrine. Paul is saying, “Do not get creative with your prophetic statements! It must conform to sound doctrine—the faith.”
- Others, however, believe that the faith here is a reference to his or her faith. That is, prophecy must come out from the faith that God has given the believer. Paul is saying, “Do not go beyond what God has actually revealed to you!” You see, prophecy sprung forth from faith. So, Paul says that the prophecy must be “in proportion” to your faith (e.g. *ESV, NIV, KJV, NET, NAS; Schreiner, Fitzmyer*).

So, which is it? Well, let’s look at another text.

- Let’s begin by looking at a text where Paul himself prophesies and explains that it was produced in conformity to his faith. **Turn to Acts 27.**
  - In this chapter, Paul is being transported on a ship in dangerous, winter-time, waters to Rome.
  - As the ship and crew are working through the Mediterranean, it looks like they are all going to perish, but God gives Paul a prophetic statement about their future to give to the crew.
  - **Let’s read verses 21–26.**
    - In this passage, Paul prophesies and specifically calls attention to his faith, and the prophecy is fulfilled a short time later.
    - This fulfilled prophecy confirmed Paul’s testimony and gave him many opportunities on the island of Malta in the days ahead!
    - So, that text connects one’s “faith” with “prophecy”.
- But there is a hint about this in our own text as well.
  - **Turn back to Romans 12.**
  - You might remember that Paul told the Roman believers to think soberly about themselves in the middle of verse 3.
  - Well, to help with this sound judgment, Paul says that it should be “according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” to each.

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<sup>267</sup> This word is a *hapax* in the NT. Context, then, must certainly determine how we take it.

- God portions out—distributes—faith to believers and our assessment of ourselves should consider how much faith God has given to us.
- I think this phrase—“the measure of faith” (v.3) helps us understand the phrase “in proportion to faith.” (v.6)

So, when explaining how early believers should prophesy, he says that they should do it in direct proportion to the faith that they have been given from God. I am sure it must have been tempting to say more than what God had actually given to the prophet. “I am on a role here, let me just keep talking!” “No,” Paul says, “prophecy must be in proportion to what you have been given.”

Now, we can still learn some valuable lessons from Paul’s instructions. Our gifts spring forth from grace and faith as well. Our ministry in the church is in proportion to the faith he has given us as well. So, that is prophecy!

- **Service (7a)** – <sup>7</sup> *If service, in our serving.*

Now, having dealt with the controversial gift, we can now work through the others. Next, Paul describes how to use the gift of service in verse 7. **Read it.**

Now, he does not tell us too much here. He starts with the gift but emphasizes its function. He puts the focus on using the gift in serving. The gift includes generally a “readiness and willingness to tackle tasks that ... assists others.”<sup>268</sup> Some believers love to roll up their sleeves to meet practical needs of others. This is the word that relates to the office of the “deacon” and helps us understand the primary functions of deacons—to serve, to meet the practical needs of others.

If you have the gift of service, use it in the church!

- **The one who teaches (7b)** – *The one who teaches, in his teaching.*

Next, Paul talks about the “one who teaches” and encourages him to use his gift in the church. Teaching refers to instruction that expounds God’s written Word. Teachers do not give new revelation from God, they use their gifts to make what has been written clear to others. Pastors are to be able to do this, but others in the church might also be gifted by God with the ability to clearly explain God’s written Word.

Teachers should give themselves to teaching and the study that it involves.

If you have this gift, use it in the church!

- **The one who exhorts (8a)** – *The one who exhorts, in his exhortation.*

In verse 8, Paul moves on to a fourth gift. It says that “the one who exhorts” should focus on “his exhortation.” Since God has gifted the exhorter in this specific way, he or she should use their gift in the church. Now, the word for “one who exhorts” is a common word for exhortation or appeal. Notice, how some scholars describe the “exhorter.”

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<sup>268</sup> Yarbrough, “Romans,” 178.

He or she ...

- “emphasizes the application of the gospel and focuses on its concrete implications for everyday life”<sup>269</sup>
- “summons others to actions and stirs them from lethargy”<sup>270</sup>
- “emboldens another in a belief or course of action”<sup>271</sup>

So, one who exhorts is one who encourages people to action. A teacher might not be gifted in calling people to concrete application, but the exhorter does not have such a problem.

Do you want to hear what good exhortation sounds like? **Look with me at verses 1–2.**

People with the gift of exhortation move people! They fire them up for gospel advance. People with this gift are strategic!

Do you know of any God-gifted exhorters—someone gifted with calling you to truth?

If you have the gift of exhortation, use it in the church!

- **The one who gives (8b) – The one who contributes, in generosity.**

Next, Paul says that those gifted in giving should use their gift as well. The giver is one who delights in using his or her possessions to help others.

- They hold their possessions lightly with loose, open hands.
- Now, you may be married to someone like this.
- You may be a bean counter, but your spouse is hard-wired by God to take joy in giving greatly to others.
- We do offer counseling to married people with different gifts, by the way!

The giver should do so “in” or “with” generosity. This word can mean “simply”—without complex motives, but in passages about giving (*cf.* 2 Cor 8), it normally means “liberally, generously.”

If you have the gift of giving, use it in this (I mean, “the”) church and do so with generosity! You do not have to be rich to have this gift by the way (*see the churches of Corinth and Philippi!*).

- **The one who leads (8c) – The one who leads, with zeal.**

Next, Paul considers some in the church who are gifted by God as leaders. This refers to one who leads, governs, or presides over the church or ministries of the church. This word can be used of pastors, but it can also be used of others who lead in the church as well.<sup>272</sup> God

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<sup>269</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 658.

<sup>270</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 658.

<sup>271</sup> Harvey, *Romans*, 302.

<sup>272</sup> Davey writes, “It seems, then, that Paul is instructing second-tier leaders to minister with zeal.” Davey, *Romans*, ?.

has gifted some of you with great leadership gifts. You use them in your family. You use them at work. Use them in the church as well!

People with this gift should use their gift “with zeal,” with passion and vitality. That makes sense, right? Can you imagine a good leader who has little zeal in what he is doing?

Have you ever been in a board meeting where people were just beating an idea up until one person steps up and leads with clarity and zeal? Are you not glad for such people? Now, imagine that God has gifted some such people in the church!

You may have retired in your occupation. Great. Congrats. Now, use your gifts in the church!

If you have the gift of leadership, use it with zeal in the church!

- **The one who shows mercy (8d) – The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Finally, God gifts some of his people to demonstrate something that He himself does. Since our God is a merciful God, He gifts his people to show mercy as well. The one who does acts of mercy enjoys helping the needy—the vulnerable, poor, or hurting—in the church. God gives some people big, tender hearts to help people.

So, Paul encourages the person who does acts of mercy to do so “with cheerfulness.” The only other time this word is used in the Bible, it is in LXX Proverbs (18:22), of a man who is “glad” because he has found a wife! When you roll up your sleeves and use this gift in the church, you should be joyful—full of cheer!

A preacher once told the story of a group of animals who decided to get together and do a little training. He said,

*The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his webbed-feet to be badly worn, so he became only average in swimming.... The rabbit started at the top of his class in running but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make up work in swimming.... The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class. The reason was that his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the tree top down. He developed Charlie horses from over-exertion and got a C in climbing and a D in running.*

The moral of this illustration is obvious! Every creature will succeed in its areas of strength!

- Are you using the gifts that God’s Spirit has distributed to you?
- Are you filled with desire to be used of the Lord in the church?
- Do you desire this more than you do a good golf game or a nice home or a robust retirement or a boyfriend or girlfriend?

Will you not commit to use your spiritual gifts in the church?

What could we accomplish in Hampton Roads and the world if we came together?  
We cannot do it well without you!

## b) Thinking rightly about how we live (9–21)

In Romans 12, Paul lays out his vision for what a Christian community should look like. He starts with the personal, individual transformation that God expects of us before moving on to how we should think corporately about using our gifts in the church.

At the end of the chapter—verses 9–21—he gets even more practical and specific to show us exactly what our Christian community should be like when he gives his very long list of commands. More specifically, he gives approximately 29 commands. Not “9 marks” of a healthy ministry – it’s Paul’s “29 marks.”

We have become familiar with long, inter-woven, insightful doctrinal arguments in Romans, but that is not what we have here! These commands are rapid and, sometimes, not directly related to those around them.

So, we might try to find ways to organize and synthesize them.

- The best proposals of organization for this section are that the passage moves from the way that believers should treat insiders (*other believers in the church*; vv. 9–13 or 9–15) to how they should treat outsiders (*unbelievers*; vv. 14–21 or 16–21) or that it moves from general exhortations toward love and goodness (vv. 9–16) to specific exhortation to non-retaliation (vv. 17–21).
- Instead, it seems to me that Paul is simply moving from obligation to obligation in the list, some of which can be grouped and others that stand alone. Some have to do with our relationship with God, others with how we treat believers, and others about how we treat unbelievers.
- There is some order to these commands, but we will just go through them “one after another.” Line by line in two sermons.

Together, these 29 commands reveal Paul’s vision for the church. If you were now to ask Paul what a church should look like, I think he would mention these things.

Now, one responsibility that pastors have is to assess the culture of their church and to speak into areas that they feel are out of line with proper church culture. Have you ever considered our church culture?

- If you were to go on vacation to Hawaii and spend time with Hawaiians, you could make observations about their culture.
- This is true in missions as well!
  - You might see that they enjoy conversations and spending time together.
  - You might see that time is not important to them.
  - When they get together, they are always late, but they also stay much longer than most Americans.
  - When you came back from the trip, people might ask you: What are Hawaiians like?
  - And you would probably be able to describe them.
- If people visited our church, what observations would they make?
  - What would they see about our commitments and how we spend time together?
  - What good things would they see?
  - What weaknesses would they describe?

- This passage reveals Paul's vision for healthy church culture... so, let's dig in!

So, we will look at Paul's vision for church culture while assessing our own. Let's not do this to gain praise by guests, but let's do so because we know that a church that lives in these ways demonstrates that the gospel is true and powerful and working today! Let's listen and strive to grow so that others would understand that our great God is still powerful to change lives through His Son, Jesus Christ.

- **A summary of Paul's vision (9a) - <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine.**

Now, when describing his vision for the church, Paul starts with love. It should not surprise us that another one of his lists starts with love. **Let's read verse 9.**

Paul begins in verse 9 with the word *agape*. Now, this is a distinct, Bible word that is sometimes used of God's great love for us in Jesus and other times of the way we are to love Him or others.

- Jesus said that love would enable us to fulfill the two greatest commands in the law.
- Paul puts love as the primary fruit of the Spirit, from which all the others would flow.
- In 1 Corinthians, Paul devotes a whole chapter to it, saying that it is even more valuable than faith or hope.
- In that chapter, it says that if we do not use our gifts "in love," then they are worthless and useless.
- So, it is no surprise that Paul mentions "love" here just after talking about the "gifts" again.

So, at the front of our list of commands, Paul describes the love that he desires in the church. The ESV says that it should be "genuine" (ἀνυπόκριτος).

- Now, the actual word that is used here comes from the word *hupokritos*. It literally means that love must be "without hypocrisy."
- In the ancient world, the *hupokrites* was an actor who played a part, hiding his true identity behind the stage character. Love must not be only an outward display; it must be real and genuine.

Now, what is not really explained here is the object of the love that Paul wants us to show.

- We might assume that he's speaking of the way that we love one another.
- He does not make that clear here, but it seems better to see that Paul's vision for our church culture involves genuine love for God.
- Love has always involved God in some way in every occurrence of agape up to this point in Romans!
- Paul will transition to loving others in the next verse; here, however, Paul does not want us all pretending that we love God.

This is the summary of his entire vision! This is what Paul really wants! He frontloads it! He does not want us to be hypocritical! He wants us to love God genuinely! Regarding this, it was said of the great preacher, William Arnot, "His preaching is good. His writing is better. His living is best of all."

Are you genuine in your love for God? That is the summary—the main point—of Paul's entire vision for the church. The rest (28) expound more on what genuine love looks like!

- **An elaboration of Paul's vision (9b) - *Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.***

Next, Paul elaborates on that in the rest of verse 9—an elaboration of Paul's vision (v. 9a). In other words, what does genuine love for God look like in our lives? That is how I understand the second half of the verse. ***Let's read it.***

When our love for God is genuine, we “abhor what is evil and cling to that which is good.” So, if you asked Paul what genuine love looks like, it looks like hating evil and clinging to good.

- Now, it is not that we simply stay away from or even denounce evil.
  - No, the text says that “we loathe it”—we hate it.
  - How are you doing? Really?
  - This is God's desire for you!
  - You might think you are ok because you are not following through on what you think are the worst sins.
  - You stop short and do not do it!
  - But does evil disgust you? Is it appalling to you?
  - Or are you flirting with it and cultivating it in your mind and imagination?
  - That is how God wants us to see evil!
  - Do you hate evil or are you just pretending that you love God?
- Genuine love for God also involves “holding fast to” or “clinging, clutching” onto good.
- What is upright—morally excellent.
- The Bible describes what is “good” on just about every page.
- It is what is holy and righteous.

This elaboration about what genuine love includes is profound. Let me suggest that you do a few things with this.

- First, if we keep these values in our minds (*maybe memorize [member memorizing Rom 12] and rehearse regularly!*), it would help us know how to respond to anything we face in life. Even if we are confused by what our society values and expects (they are constantly cranking out new values!), we would know what to do. We do not need to be experts!
- We need to do this!
- Second, might I suggest that we teach these two commands to our children. As a parent, we strive to form the worldview of our children (*parent teaching fruit of spirit to child*). Well, imagine teaching your young child this: God wants us to hate—despise, abhor—what is evil and He wants us to cling to good. This would not only help them know that there such things as “good” and “evil,” it would engrain God's call to respond properly and personally to them!

So, if someone observed you—shadowed you—throughout the week, would they say that your love for God is genuine? Would they see you loathing evil and clinging onto good? Paul's vision for a church is that every believer is this way!

- **Descriptions of Paul's vision (10–21)**

After summarizing his vision and elaborating on what love is, Paul describes it more fully. That is, in Paul's list of commands in verses 10 through 21, Paul describes the culture that he expects in church in at least seven ways. These are Paul's seven marks of genuine love!

- **Description 1: The culture that Paul envisions first demands family love.** <sup>10</sup> *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

Paul describes how we treat “one another” in verse 10. Our culture as a church must include showing brotherly, familial affection and honor to one another. It starts with “love”—brotherly love (*philadelphia*).

- **Brotherly affection** – Now, Paul actually says that we should love one another with “brotherly affection.”
  - This final expression contains two words for love joined together—the word for brotherly love and another word that means “affection.”
  - This second term spoke of a dear or warm affection of the heart.

The culture of the Thessalonian church was filled with this so that Paul could say, “Concerning brotherly love, you have no need for me to write to you... for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia” (1 Thess 4).

- That church had an excellent testimony that sounded out all throughout the regions around them.
- When people saw that church, they felt brotherly love.
- No doubt, some who visited would say, “They really care for each other there!”
- Having said that, listen to what Paul explains about them in his next letter to them: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another *is* increasing” (2 Thess 1:3).

If people observed our church culture, would they see that we have deep warmth and affection for one another? Would they see something that looks like family affection? This might be hard. You might just want to avoid someone in the congregation. That is not enough! It is not just enough to pray for them! We must show warm, tender-hearted affection toward them!

- **Then outdo ... in showing honor** – Paul adds that believers must also “outdo one another in showing honor.”
  - The word “outdo” means literally to “go before” someone else.
  - It is a competition word.
  - Do you like to compete?
  - Do you like to win?
  - I have to admit that I love to win, whether it is golf or pickleball or Settlers!

In this text, Paul lays out his vision for us regarding competition. In the church we should be eager ... we should show initiative to ... honor or show respect to one another—quick to jump in!

So, that is the first description—Paul demands family affection for one another!

- **Description 2: The culture that Paul envisions does *not* include lethargy (11).** <sup>11</sup> *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

Next, Paul describes his vision in another way in verse 11. **Let's look there.**

In the original, the second and the third phrases in verse 11 follow the same exact formula—one different from the first phrase. So, I see the first command—"Do not be slothful in zeal" to be the main ingredient in Paul's vision here and the other two as telling you more about the first command.

Now, a full grasp of Paul's intention with this command is difficult. Paul is calling for some kind of strong zeal, zeal that does not lag in any way. The RSV translates, "Never flag in zeal."

- How are you doing in this?
  - Do you remember Jesus's condemnation of the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2?
  - He said, "Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have abandoned your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first" (2:4–5).
- Are you flagging in zeal?

Now, when combined with the final command in verse 11, however, this unflagging zeal is in our service to the Lord. We live in a world where many people do not really work hard! I heard of a recent article that studied people at work to find out that the average American worker puts in only about one to two hours of work in an eight hour work day! But Paul lays an expectation on everyone one of us—that we are not lazy or lethargic in how we serve the Lord! Are you so zealously serving the Lord in the church so that you are unflagging, unrelenting, untiring? Be honest! What would your wife or husband think of your service to God?

When stated positively, this means that Paul envisions a church who is "fervent in spirit."

- The word "fervent" comes from a word that can literally mean "boiling, bubbling, or fermenting."
  - John Stott rightfully says that the word does not convey the idea of a "glowing lamp" as much as it does a "boiling, bubbling pot."<sup>273</sup>
  - This boiling fervency is in or for something or someone which is indicated with the word "spirit."
    - Now, because of some parallels between Paul's list in this passage and 1 Thessalonians 5, it seems that Paul is calling for fervency in the Holy Spirit.
    - In other words, Paul is calling for unwavering zeal and fervency in the Holy Spirit as we serve the Lord.
    - It was said in Acts of Apollos that he was "boiling over in the Spirit."
    - We must have great spiritual fervency.
    - Does that describe you?
    - Do not be lazy in serving the Lord but do so with zeal and spiritual fervency!
- **Description 3: The culture that Paul envisions includes joy, perseverance, and prayer (12).** <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

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<sup>273</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 331.

Next, in verse 12, we come to three commands that belong together. Notice how each one gives a command and then a condition—“in hope ... in tribulation ... in prayer.” These three belong together in some way, so we will call them three cardinal virtues (*or commitments*) of believers in the church. They are ...

- **Joy** – First, joy. Believers must be filled with joy. But that is not all he says with this first one.
  - He demonstrates the close connection between joy and hope.
  - Schreiner summarizes this well: “Believers are to be filled with joy due to the hope that awaits them. Joy evaporates when hope vanishes.”<sup>274</sup>
  - That is one reason why passages about our great future hope are so important for the health of the church.
  - I am prayerfully strategizing about how, in the future, we can consider more passages about our great future hope!

So, if people visited our church, would they see a church that is filled with joy because we have a strong focus on the future hope? The predominant note of our worship service is joy—inspired by hope!

- **Perseverance** – Then Paul calls for the church to “be patient” or to persevere “in tribulations.”
  - It seems that the believers in Rome were enduring some level of tribulation or affliction from the world around them.
  - They were being squeezed and pressured to conform to the world, yet Paul says that they must be patient in the midst of such pressure.
  - The word for “patience” means to stay under. They were able to faithfully stay under affliction.
- **Prayer** – Finally, Paul says that his vision for the Roman church is that they would be “constant in prayer.”
  - Men and women, there is no way to properly explain this passage without seeing that Paul expects churches to regularly, normally, pray.
  - May I ask you, are you given to regular or consistent prayer?
  - I commend some of you who get together week-after-week to pray!
    - When you have people over to the house, do you pray?
    - When you are happy, do you pray?
    - When you are sad, do you pray?
    - When you are sick, do you pray? Perhaps, it is easier then!
    - When are you healthy, do you pray?
  - How about the culture of our church?

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<sup>274</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 666.

- If people visited our church and then went home to explain what we are like, would they say, these people really believe in prayer?
  - They were constantly doing it.
  - You say, “Can’t we go back to the doctrinal section of Romans, this is too painful!”
  - Paul is probing—interfering! This is an overwhelming vision for church culture.
  - May God help us!
- **Description 4: The culture that Paul envisions includes generosity (13).** <sup>13</sup> *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

So, we must love God genuinely by hating evil and embracing good. We must demonstrate family love. We must also avoid laziness in our service to the Lord! We must also be filled with joy, perseverance, and prayer. But let’s consider one more mark. **Look with me at verse 13.**

In this verse, Paul talks about how a church is to use its resources in service to the Lord. He imagines that believers in Rome would be generous, willing to 1) give their money and 2) open up their homes to help others.

Now, more specifically, the type of giving that he encourages here is giving to the needs of the “saints.”

- This passage does not forbid giving to unbelievers, but it does not mention it either.
- Other passages encourage believers to help the poor.
- This passage puts a focus on needy believers.
- In our church, it is verses like this one that led us to establish the deacon’s fund.
- Now, the deacon’s fund is not a special offering that the deacons have for their own needs—vacation fund!
- No, it’s an offering that the deacons can use to meet specific needs in the body.
- This is not the only way that you can give to needy believers. You can do so directly as well!

Paul also imagines a church filled with hospitality.

- Let’s look closely at the exact wording that he uses here.
- Paul says, “seek to show hospitality.”
- He does not simply say “be hospitable,” he says “seek” it.
- This could also be translated “pursue” it.
- Many years ago, Origin explained this well: “We are not just to receive the stranger when he comes to us, but actually to enquire after, and look carefully for, strangers, to pursue them and search them out everywhere.”
- This means that we open up our house not only to other believers in the church but other believers who are travelling through or other people who have needs.
- This is counter-cultural for us!
- But are you opening your home!
- We need host homes for community groups! Every believer must be generous! This is Paul’s vision for every member! How are you contributing to this church culture?

- **Description 4: The culture that Paul envisions includes generosity (13).** *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

Last week, we started working through a long list of short commands (27!). This list conveys Paul's vision for church culture.

- If you visited Ireland and spent time with the Irish in little towns and villages, you could convey to your friends what Irish culture is like.
- Each church has a culture as well and we want to consider this passage so we can assess our own culture and make corrections or adjustments that conform with scripture.

So, last week, we saw that love God genuinely by hating evil and embracing good. We cannot just say we love God while we indulge in evil. We must also demonstrate family love and be filled with joy. We go through trials, and we wonder how long they will last. It is like waiting for an install to finish.

But let's look forward to Paul's 4<sup>th</sup> description of healthy church culture. ***Look with me at verse 13.***

In this verse, Paul describes how a church is to use its resources in service to the Lord. He imagines that believers in Rome would be generous, willing to 1) give their money and 2) open their homes to help others.

Now, more specifically, the type of giving that he encourages here is giving to the needs of the "saints."

- This passage does not forbid giving to unbelievers, but it does not mention it either.
- Other passages encourage believers to help the poor.
- This passage, however, puts a focus on needy believers.
- In our church, it is verses like this one that encourages us to give to the deacon's fund.
  - Now, the deacons fund is not a special offering that the deacons have for their own needs—vacation fund!
  - No, it is an offering that the deacons can use to meet specific needs in the body.
  - Today, we will take up one of these!
- This is not the only way to give to needy believers; you can do so directly as well!

Paul also imagines a church filled with hospitality.

- But let's look closely at the exact wording that he uses at the end of v. 13.
- Paul says, "seek to show hospitality."
  - He does not simply say "be" hospitable, he says "seek" it.
  - This could also be translated "pursue" it.
- Many years ago, Origin explained this well: "We are not just to receive the stranger when he comes to us, but actually to enquire after, and look carefully for, strangers, to pursue them and search them out everywhere."

- This means that we open up our houses not only to other believers in the church but others who are travelling through or have needs.
- **Description 5: The culture that Paul envisions includes gracious responses (14–15).**  
<sup>14</sup> *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* <sup>15</sup> *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

Next, Paul lays out his expectation for the church to be filled with grace in the way believers respond to one another. That is how I take verses 14 and 15. **Read them.**

Paul specifically lays out three responses in these verses.

- **Bless persecutors** – First, we must bless our persecutors. This is what verse 14 demands of us.
  - To better understand this, we have to first consider who might persecute us.
    - Some believe that the persecutors that Paul has in mind here are believers, since verse 13 is about how we treat “saints” and, at least, portions of verses 15–16 are about how we treat believers too (e.g., “with each other” in verse 16a).
    - And that is entirely possible, as one man says, “Sadly, family members may persecute one another.”
  - The question I have, however, is whether we are certain that Paul does not have unbelievers in mind too.
    - Is it possible that unbelievers might persecute the Roman believers?
    - There is no question historically that they were persecuted by unbelievers.
    - Could not Paul be addressing that too?
    - So, I see verse 14 as referring to persecutors, whether they are inside or outside the church.
  - Regarding these persecutors, Paul says, that we must “bless [them] ... bless and do not curse them.”
    - But what does it mean to “bless” someone?
      - Well, this word can be used of what God does for us!
        - He showers us with benefits and grace.
        - He blesses us!
      - The word can also be used of how we treat God.
        - We bless him; that is, we offer up praise to him for who He is and how he has loved us.
      - But, in this context, the word “bless” means that we “invoke God’s blessings on them.”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 134.

- In other words, we ask God to bless our persecutors and not to curse them.
- Can you imagine praying, “God, I pray that you bless.”
- We must do more than imagine.

- **Rejoice with rejoicers**

Well, that is a gracious response. Paul then continues this focus in the next verse—verse 15—when he says that we should “rejoice with those who rejoice.”

- It is not always easy to be happy for those who are experiencing joy.
- This means that their circumstances become more important to us than our own.
- We might be experiencing difficulty and loss, but Paul expects us to truly rejoice with those who rejoice.

- **Weep with weepers**

And the following is probably even more difficult for some of us. Paul says that we must “weep with those who weep.”

- This means that we show compassion and strive to understand and share other’s sadness as we encourage them in the Lord.
- “Weeping with those who weep” means that we not just offer stoic advice or that we are content to offer counsel without feeling the predicament of others.

Now, neither of these two responses calls for us to compromise truth.

- If people are rejoicing about something that is not in line with scripture, I do not believe that Paul is addressing that here (*rejoicing in an ungodly marriage, injustice bringing them gain, etc.*).
- This also does not mean that we do not graciously point “weepers” to truth. No, when we show empathy, it is tethered to the scripture.<sup>276</sup> This is an important distinction that cuts against cultural values.
  - To use an illustration here, if someone is sinking in quicksand, it does not really help to jump in with them to feel their sorrow—to hug them and hold them.
  - Instead, we keep one foot on solid ground, and we hold them and care for them and graciously pull them to solid ground.
  - The solid ground is scripture.
  - This is tethered empathy, and this requires God’s profound wisdom and grace to properly care for others!

That is why I call these gracious responses. That is the culture that Paul envisions in the church—1) bless our persecutors, 2) rejoice with rejoicers, and 3) weep with those experiencing sorrow!

- **Description 6: The culture that Paul envisions includes humility (16).** <sup>16</sup> *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

Next, in verse 16, Paul calls for culture that includes a commitment to humility. **Read it.**

In this verse, Paul continues issuing commands. These have to do with humility.

The first command could literally be translated that believers should “think the same thing” (τὸ αὐτὸ εἰς ἀλλήλους φρονοῦντες).

- Here Paul is calling for a “common attitude and purpose” in the church.<sup>277</sup>
- He does not expect us to agree on everything, but he does expect us to come to a common agreement on the essentials.

Paul then moves on to how believers should relate to other brothers in the church who are lowly. Instead of demonstrating pride, we must associate with the lowly—those of lower repute or status in the church.

- We must not avoid those in the church who appear to be disadvantaged or poor.
- We must not develop relationships with other believers who can do something for us—who can advance our cause or reputation.
- Paul’s call to associate with the lowly follows Jesus’s example of eating with tax collectors and sinners.

Finally, we must also “never be wise in our own sight.”

- Paul has repeatedly called for true and genuine humility in the church in Rome.
- This requires that we think properly about our own perspectives.
- Our standard for every judgment must not be our own opinion or perspective.

- **Description 7: The culture that Paul envisions includes non-retaliation (17–21).** <sup>17</sup> *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* <sup>18</sup> *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* <sup>19</sup> *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”* <sup>20</sup> *To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”* <sup>21</sup> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

But then we come to one last description of the culture that Paul expects in the church. This last description involves several commands that all have to do with non-retaliation.

While it has been tempting to categorize or organize some of the independent commands before, these final ones in verses 17–21 all do have to do with refusing to retaliate against those who do evil to us. As a matter of fact, the mention of “evil” in verse 17 and again in verse 21 holds this whole passage together. **So, let’s read verses 17–21.**

Paul desires for the church not to retaliate. You might think that this is not a problem for you or for your church, but let's look more closely at this passage at the five commitments of a church that practices non-retaliation. In this passage, Paul will look at non-retaliation in a few different ways. It is like he keeps turning it over and looks at it from another angle. Each verse actually reveals a little different picture of what it involves.

▪ ***First, it begins with our commitment not to “repay ... evil for evil” (v. 17).***

- If someone wrongs you or your family, what will you do?
- This strong command flies in the face of the famous saying: “I do not get mad; I get even.”
- Yet, it is not our job to punish wrongdoers.
- Instead, we should think about an honorable way to respond.
- What would all people consider a good and gracious response?

▪ ***Second, this commitment requires a desire to “live peaceably with all” (v. 18).***

- In verse 18, Paul ministers in the real world.
- He knows that it is not always possible for believers to enjoy healthy relationships with everyone else.
  - Sometimes, other people are just not willing to restore relationships or sometimes they “lay down a condition for reconciliation” that does not comply with scripture.<sup>278</sup>
- So, he says, “As far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all.”
  - This means that the church should be full of believers who sow peace and harmony.
  - Believers who like to argue and disagree strongly with others should not be comfortable in a church committed to peace.

▪ ***Third, this commitment to non-retaliation requires that we “never avenge ourselves but leave the matter to God” (v. 19).***

- Paul knows that what he says in verse 19 will be difficult for believers to practice, so he starts out with the title “Beloved.” He begins by reminding them how much he loves them.
- Then he commands that we never avenge ourselves.
- We must not take justice into our own hands to right how we have been wronged.
- Instead, we must commit to leave the matter to God.
- More specifically, we must leave the matter to “the wrath of God.”
  - The wrath of God is a major focus in the book of Romans.
  - It has been specifically mentioned nine times already and will do so two times in the next chapter as well (1:18; 2:5 [2x], 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 [2x]; 12:19; 13:4, 5).
  - Let's be honest, it is really hard for us to wait to let our offenders—those who hurt us—to go on without punishment.

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<sup>278</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 335.

- It may feel that they are prospering without consequences.
- Yet, if we focus on what Paul says about God's wrath, it will change our perspective.
- Now, to help some of you who might be struggling here, let me read some of these Romans passages to you.

*Rom 2:5-6 – But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his deeds.*

*Rom 2:8 – But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

*Rom 1:18 – For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

- Men and women, the last day will bear out who was in the right and who was in the wrong!
- This is hard for earthly-minded people, but for those whose gaze is fixed on our Christian hope and on Jesus, it is possible!
- We must allow room for God to act and to punish the offender.
- Now, to prove that scripture is on Paul's side in this matter, he quotes a verse: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord."
  - This text comes from Deut 32:35.
  - This comes from the famous "Song of Moses" near the end of the Law.
  - In this passage, Moses reveals that God momentarily used a foolish nation and a "no people" to punish his own people, but that God will not let it go on indefinitely.
  - Instead, their destruction is "at hand" and will come "swiftly."
  - This foundational, famous passage assures God's people of vindication.
  - God says, "I do vengeance." "You never get to do that!"

So, this text—verse 19—says that we must "never avenge ourselves." Some of us will then ask, "Are we always to be passive?" "Are we then to be a punching bag or a door mat?"

- Well, let me just say that Paul will turn to the role of governmental authorities and leaders in the very next chapter. Paul anticipates your question and says that these leaders are installed by God to "protect man from man."
- If you, for instance, are suffering from "domestic abuse," this is not a verse that would tell you to just take it.
  - No, we have the right to appeal to—to run to—governmental leaders.
  - We also have the right to appeal to church leaders to confront unrepentant brothers and sisters.
  - We also have the right to defend ourselves.
- These are temporal, earthly things that we can do for protection.
- Ultimately, however, even when doing these things, we must leave room for the wrath of God.

- **Fourth, this commitment requires that we serve those who wrong us (v. 20). Read verse 20.**

- What Paul demands is more than just restraint and trust, it also demands our firm commitment to actively serve those who have wronged us. Now, to make his point here, he again quotes scripture.

- This citation comes from **Prov 25:21–22**.

Prov 25:21–22 – *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.*

- Now, there is much debate about the expression “for you will heap burning coals on his head.” What is this?
- Well, fundamentally, this is a reason—a reason why we should meet the physical needs of our opponents.
- We should not only passively restrain ourselves from taking revenge, we should actively serve them.
- We should do this to “heap burning coals on his head.”

- Now, commentators struggle with this image (*and you may as well—I know that I really have*).

- As a matter of fact, I am sure that some of you will not really like my explanation of it!
- But all I can do is tell you what I believe this passage is all about.
- *Some* say this cannot mean something like desiring vengeance or revenge as the whole point of all these verses has been not to seek retaliation.
- So, many say that this comes from an ancient Egyptian custom (*maybe the Jews were exposed to this in Egypt*) when a repentant person would put ash coals on his own head to reveal his remorse.
- There is some evidence for this proposal, although it is not as strong as some people think it is!
- This view is possible, but perhaps a middle road between “seeking vengeance” or “repentance” is better.

- From my study this week, I found only one other passage in the OT, where the words for “head” and “burning coals” are present.

- The text is Psa 140:7–10. **Read it.**

Psa 140:7–10 – O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle.... *As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them! Let burning coals from upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise!*

- These are words of King David.

- Here David describes what he wants for those who oppose him—his enemies, the enemies of Israel.
- In this passage, he uses common battle imagery.
- He prays for God to protect him in his most vulnerable areas (*cover my head*) and calls for God to destroy his war enemies (140:2; *reign down burning coals on them*).
- Now, instead of this being a prayer for personal vengeance, it is a prayer that God will grant victory over his enemies, coming to their aide in their affliction.
  - It is a prayer for deliverance from fierce people.
  - It is a prayer that God will defend and vindicate them.
- So, to make my thoughts as clear as I can, I do not believe this passage is about revenge or taking personal vengeance.
  - That is clearly and strongly condemned in this passage.
  - This passage, however, does not condemn desiring vindication.
  - That is, it is not necessarily wrong to desire to be cleared of accusations or to desire for justice to be done.
  - So often, the motive for vindication is a desire for revenge.
  - But we have to be very careful here because many of us treat this desire for vindication as a back door way of getting the revenge that we want.
    - We would be much, much better off if we focused on the imperatives here.
    - We must “never avenge ourselves” and “we should feed our enemies when they are hungry.”
    - That sounds much like the way that our Lord treated those who crucified them.
    - He could have prayed for revenge for personal vengeance to occur.
    - Instead, he says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
    - So, in your prayers for vindication and justice, give more time to pray for their repentance and forgiveness, and in your actions, never avenge yourself, but serve those who stand against you.

- ***Finally, this commitment demands that we do good to those who wrong us (v. 21).***

Then, as a final statement summary of what non-retaliation involves, Paul says in verse 21 that it demands that we “do good” to them. We must not allow evil to overcome us by responding to it with our own evil. Instead, we must do good to those who have done evil to us.

## **B. Submission to Governing Authorities (13:1–7)**

When Paul wrote Romans 12–15, he addressed certain pastoral concerns that he had for believers in Rome.

- Although he had never been there, he is concerned with the way they live.

- He is concerned that they ... 1) use their gifts in the church, 2) love one another with brotherly affection, 3) be constant in prayer, 4) contribute to the needs of the saints, 5) seek to show hospitality, 6) bless their persecutors, and 7) never avenge themselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.

Now, as Paul lays out his expectations for the Romans believers, he spends the first part of Romans 13 to describe the way that they should relate as citizens to the governmental leaders of the Roman empire.

- Paul wants to shape the way that the Roman believers relate to officials.
- That is, this text is about Christians and government, and this is a great time for us to think about how we relate to governmental leaders.
  - You say, “I have a few questions about that!”
  - I say, “Good, because Paul answers questions in this text!”

So, pay attention to what Paul says in this passage. He answers three questions that form the “default setting” of believers as they relate to their governmental leaders.

- Now, you will hear all kinds of advice in our present age about this but remember that Paul warned us about listening to the present, evil age.
- Instead, the Word—the text—must give us our answers.
  - Have you ever been working on a computer or smartphone and had things all messed up after trying so many things, so you just “reset” it?
  - You pushed the button or clicked on the “reset manufacturer” option.
  - That is what many of us should do here.
  - Let the Bible control your settings when it comes to Christians and government.

# 1. What (1a)? <sup>1</sup> *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.*

So, let’s begin with Paul’s answers. First, Paul answers the “what” question. What does Paul expect from us? What does God expect from us? Well, look at the first part of verse 1.

The text says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.” Now, let me point out three things about what Paul says here.

- **First, this is a command.** It is an imperative. Paul is not putting a suggestion to us! This is God’s command to us in the text of scripture.
- **Second, this command is not a secondary issue.**
  - Some of us might think: “Well, Paul says it but he’s just getting things going. It’s not that important. Maybe we should just keep reading to find something more important in the passage.”
  - Well, this is the important part.
  - It is the main and guiding verb.
  - It not only sets the trajectory for what Paul says about Christians and government, it is the main subject.
  - Everything else in this passage relates to this command in some way or another and the command is restated near the end of the passage as well.
    - **Look at verse 5.**
    - This could literally be translated, “Therefore, it is necessary to submit.”

- This is the primary teaching of the passage, “Every person must submit to the governing authorities.
- **Third, this command is clear.** The verb “be subject to” is a word that means something different than and more than “obey.” It includes obeying when specific regulations or laws are involved, but it speaks to something sometimes more difficult for us. It means that we must recognize that we are subordinate to or under the authorities in our government. So, Paul says that it is necessary, it is indispensable, that we submit ourselves to the governing authorities that have been placed over us.

That is what God expects of us! It is clear. We must submit to the governing authorities. That is the “default setting” that Paul lays out for believers in how they relate to government. Now, when some of you hear that, I am sure that some questions almost immediately come to mind!

- Some of you, for instance, might be thinking: “Well, is this always true?” “What if our governing authorities are bad or demand that we disobey God?” “Do we submit then?” If Paul only knew how bad our Senator or President or Governor was, he would not tell us this!
  - Well, let me begin by telling you to think a bit more about that last part!
    - The leader of Rome at this time was Nero!
    - You ever heard of that name before?
    - Yeah, he was a pretty bad guy who was going to take things from Christians, including not only taxes, but their lives eventually!
    - Yet, Paul addresses this letter to believers in Rome.
    - Our situation historically might not be all that bad when compared to ancient Rome!
  - Now, having said that, I should also explain that this passage is not the only one in the Bible about how believers should relate to governing authorities. There are other passages, where believers did, in fact, disobey governing authorities who were asking them to sin. I offer to you this abbreviated list:
    - Hebrew midwives (Exod 1:15–22) – They ordered to kill male babies.
    - Esther (Esther 4:16) – She broke the law to save her people.
    - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:16–18) – They refused to bow to the state.
    - Daniel (Dan 6:10) – He continued to pray.
    - Wise men (Matt 2:8–12) – They refused to tell the king where Jesus was.
    - Peter and John (Acts 4:18–20; 5:29) – They refused to obey the Sanhedrin when they told them to stop preaching Jesus.
  - These passages portray times when believers were given no choice but to disobey.
  - Perhaps, Peter’s answer to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5 acts as a good guide for us in situations where authorities are demanding that we disobey God: “We must obey God rather than men.”
  - So, do not let governing authorities pressure you into obeying them if they are defying God or His Word.
    - History books provide examples of governments like the “Third Reich” using this very verse to demand that believers submit to them.
    - Some believers and preachers, however, refused and died because they could not disobey God.

- I was greatly moved by the decision of one brave country pastor in Germany to refuse to follow that administration—they forbid him from preaching and pastoring anymore, so he was “treated medically” in prison (*punished with lethal injection*).
- His words to the governing authorities were this: “Even if the punishments are applied, I still know that God will establish justice for all who suffer injustice, and that he will also judge between me and my government on his Day of Judgment.”<sup>279</sup>
- Let me just caution you, however, that you must be confident.
  - It must be clear that your leaders are indeed demanding something that goes against the Bible or forbidding you to obey God.
  - It is the “Word” that is our final authority in the matter.
  - It is not wise for us to follow “the spirit of this age” or listen to “cultural experts” or “religious experts” who tell us when to get in line and when to rebel.
  - No! I do not care about that! It is the text—the Word—that must guide us.
- This text tells us that the “default setting” for believers is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.

## 2. Why (1b–5)?

Now, you might hear that and begin wondering—“Why?” “Why must I be in subjection?” Well, that is the exact question that Paul answers next. In verses 1b–5, Paul lays out two reasons to submit to our leaders.

- a. **We must submit because God appoints our leaders (1b–2a).** *For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.*

Paul gives the first reason in verses 1b–2a. **Look there with me.**

Those in government have “derived” authority. They do not have “absolute” authority, only God has that. Instead, their authority comes from God because God is the one who installed or appointed them. In other words, God is sovereign over elections and installations. We can see that clearly in this passage and the Scriptures are full of this idea. Let me cite a few places where we are reminded of this:

- Prov 8:15–16 – <sup>15</sup> *By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; <sup>16</sup> by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.*
- Jer 27:4–6 – <sup>4</sup> *Thus says the Lord of hosts ... “<sup>5</sup> It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. <sup>6</sup> Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him.”*
- Dan 4:17, 32 – <sup>17</sup> *... That the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men. <sup>32</sup> And you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to*

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. Thielman, *Romans*, 620.

*eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

- *John 19:11* – <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”

These passages make it clear that governing leaders are set up by God. So, we should submit because of God’s sovereignty.

- He is the one who sets them up.
- They are his servants and his ministers.
- They are not just civil servants; they are God’s servants.
- If then, we resist them or rebel against them, we are resisting or rebelling against God.
- The word for resists in the original, is the exact opposite of submission.
- Instead of placing ourselves under our leaders, we set ourselves up against them.
- That means we set ourselves up against God!

Now, having said that, it would be wise for governing leaders to remember this!

- They have risen to office or power because God did it and one day they will be accountable to him for how they served!
- Unfortunately, it seems that many leaders fail to recognize this in our post-modern world today!
- The stories of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and Darius in Daniel 4–6 make that point abundantly clear!
- May God use these words with dictators and totalitarian leaders or agnostic leaders in our world who refuse to acknowledge or bow (yet) to the Most High God.

But back to Paul’s point. We must be in subjection to the governing leaders because God put them there.

- b. We must submit because rulers punish rebellion (2b–5).** *And those who resist will incur judgment.* <sup>3</sup> *For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,* <sup>4</sup> *for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.* <sup>5</sup> *Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

And, yet, there is another reason. In verses 2b–5, Paul explains that we must submit because rulers have power to punish our lack of submission. **Read it.**

In this passage, Paul pivots back and forth between the judgment that the rulers afflict on wrongdoers and God’s wrath that comes against wrongdoers. Now, Paul describes this power to judge and punish in two interesting ways in the text.

- **First, these rulers have the authority to “bear the sword.”** This was a graphic picture of the power of their Roman authorities to punish—even with death, if necessary—those who do wrong. Roman authorities literally wore swords that they could use to squash resistance.
- **Second, these rulers were “avengers” who carried out God’s wrath.** Now, this word “avenger” relates to the word “vengeance” in Romans 12. In that previous chapter, we were told that it is not our right to inflict vengeance or revenge on those who hurt and wrong us, but that we were to leave it to God. In this passage, we learn a bit more. One of the ways that God inflicts

his vengeance on wrongdoers in this life is through the hand of government. F. F. Bruce brings up a good point here. He says, “The state thus is charged with a function which has been explicitly forbidden to the Christian (12:17a, 19).”

These leaders are also responsible to establish and enforce laws that reward good. God designs it so that governmental leaders are responsible for our good in cities and states, and we should be thankful for the order that we have through the work of these servants.

- So, are you thankful for speed limits and seat belts?
- Are you thankful when you see a police car or fire truck?
- Are you grateful for stop signs and speed limits and red lights and prison systems meant to punish and reform criminals?

Now, having said all of this, we must keep in mind that Paul is telling us why we need to submit to governing leaders in this passage. We must do so because they can punish us if we rebel because their job is to punish wrongdoers and reward those that do good.

- This does not mean that government will always get this right.
- As a matter of fact, Peter assumes that sometimes they will get it wrong and addresses situations when believers suffer under unjust governments rulers!

Paul, however, lays out our foundational, fundamental, commitment. We must submit because they are set up by God and leaders will punish us if we do not.

3. **How (6–7)?** <sup>6</sup> *For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.* <sup>7</sup> *Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

But Paul has one more thing to say about believers submitting to leaders in verses 6 and 7. This time, he will answer the “how” question. “How can we do that?” “What does it practically look like?” **Look with me at verses 6 and 7.**

Now, in these verses, we learn more about what was really going on in Rome and where the rub was between Roman believers and their governing leaders at this time. Twice, Paul tells them that they should pay their taxes. I do not believe that was an accident!

We can see even in Scripture that there was tension in these historical moments between Roman emperors and Christians (*cf. Acts 18*)

- In 49 AD, for instance, Claudius decides to deport Jews from Rome because of tensions regarding *Chrestus*. Believing Jews were allowed back into the city again, around 56 AD or just a year or two before Romans was written, but the situation continued to deteriorate.
- As a matter of fact, historically there was a huge problem with the citizens of Rome and taxes in 58 AD. There is historical record of this!
  - “Tacitus, the [ancient] Roman historian and orator who was at one time a magistrate of the city of Rome, reports that during the year 58 there was such an outcry by the people of Rome against the city’s taxation system that the emperor Nero (*who reigned from 54 to 68*) was forced to intervene.”
  - So, Paul writes this book when civil agitation against Nero’s taxes, revenues, and tolls were at an all-time high.

- Normal citizens were rebelling against city leaders and there was a growing anti-government sentiment at this very time.

So, Paul says that believers must pay their taxes and revenues and do so with a heart that honors and respects their leaders.

- He argues that paying taxes is necessary and proper for citizens to support their leaders.
- We owe them this as they oversee the civil arena for us!
- You see, it is possible to pay your taxes and to have a terrible attitude about it.
- It is possible to pay them and complain to anyone who will hear you!
- And it is still possible for us to technically obey our leaders but to complain—to tell the world what we really think in our social media posts—and thus fail to honor and respect the leaders that God has set up in our own country.

Well, today, we have all heard from the text—God’s Word. Paul answered some of our questions. We might not like the answers, but the questions for you are:

- “Will you obey God?”
- “Will you submit to governing leaders?”
- “Will you pay taxes?”
- “Will you give honor and respect to the leaders that God has set up in our country?”

May God help us, and may He establish rulers in our own country that reward the good and punish the evil!

### **C. Never quit loving others (13:8–10)**

We have taken several weeks to walk through Paul’s commands that call believers to radical Christian commitment. For instance, he’s said, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God ... Do not be conformed to this world ... Use your gifts in the church ... Do not be slothful in zeal ... Be fervent in the Spirit ... Be constant in prayer ... Live in harmony with one another ... Repay no one evil for evil ... Never avenge yourselves ... Overcome evil with good.”

Now, some of us might think, “I do not want that much commitment.” “Can’t I just be like a normal Christian or a cool Christian who does not do the big things but who does not go all radical like this?” “I do not want to be weird—socially challenged or awkward like zealous Christians.” Believe it or not, I actually hear things like this as a pastor!

Well, let me say a few things about that as we begin.

- First, not all zealous Christians are socially awkward—just some of them! OK. Those things—zeal for the Lord and social awkwardness—are not mutually exclusive!
- But let me also say that if your perspective on life and Christianity involves casual, relaxed, partial commitment to Jesus, then you are in for a rude awakening in this text!
  - You see, if you truly consider our text this morning, it will be a highly confrontational experience!

When Christ made a call for disciples, he did not call people to give up a little and sometimes follow him.

- No, the call of Christ is to leave all and follow him.

- In Luke 14:33, he said, “So therefore, anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”
- Do you remember how he answered the rich, young ruler when he asked about eternal life?
  - Jesus said that he had to give up his wealth because he knew this man only wanted to add Jesus to his comfortable life.
  - Jesus knew this man valued money and riches more than him.
  - So, the rich young ruler went away sad, lost in his sin.

Now, might I say something bluntly to you this morning?

- I am very concerned for some people in the church today!
- Some of “you.”
- I am pleading in these moments for you to listen.
- This passage gets into how we live, and it reveals necessary commitments for anyone who follows Christ.
- These have to do with what you do with God’s law, his command to love, and righteous living and if you get these wrong, it is dangerous.

John Piper preached seven sermons on this passage (*I only listened to two!*). To justify his attention to this passage he said, “This is so central to the heart of Christianity and the heart of how you live your Christianity. All these things must come together in a particular way for you. If they come together in the wrong way, then you are not a Christian.”

So, I am pleading with you to pay attention as we work through this passage! In this passage, Paul calls us to two extreme commitments for true Christians: 1) never quit loving others (13:8–10) and 2) wake up and put armor on (13:11–14). The two calls in this short section have strongly impacted me this week and I hope they will do the same for you! ***Let’s pray for that.***

### 1. Notice the call (8a) – <sup>8</sup> *Owe no one anything, except to love each other.*

Now, the first call of Paul in this text is that we must never quit loving others. There are two parts to this short passage – 1) The call (8a). 2) The reason (8b). The call itself comes in verse 8. ***Let’s look at that.***

The first part of this verse seems like financial counsel. This is something Dave Ramsey or Ron Blue would probably endorse—“Owe no one anything.” Is Paul’s point here, however, to give financial counsel. Well, maybe a little. We should attempt to avoid all debt possible. That is a sound principle!

The greater point, however, is to say something about love.

- We know that because he keeps mentioning “love” in verses 8–10 (5xs).
- Now, there is a real sense that he’s already addressed the importance of love (see 12:9a, 10a, 19a).
- That section from 12:9–21 was about love too.
- As a matter of fact, some believe that 12:9–21 and 13:8–10 form an inclusion (*an envelope*) about the importance of love that holds this whole section together.

So, in this section, Paul picks up the language of finances and money from the first part of chapter 13 (*pay taxes and revenues to governing leaders*) and he closes out his concern for love.

- That is, Paul thinks of “love” as equity or currency that we can owe someone.

- He'll use the language of "debt" again in Rom 15:1 about the way the strong have "an obligation" to bear with the weak.
- Because Jesus died to save them, the strong must care for them too.

Now, in Rom 13:8, we see that his call is to love "each other."

- Paul is especially concerned with the way believers treat each other in the church.
- He will expand this to our "neighbors" in verses 8b–10, but here he prioritizes our brothers and sisters in the church.
- Because God loves our brothers and sisters, we too have an obligation—a debt—to love them.

And this is a debt that we can never fully pay off.

- Unlike other debts that we might one day pay off fully (*car, mortgage, student debt*), this is an unlimited debt that we never pay off.
- That is, Paul wants believers to understand that we should never quit loving each other.
- We should never think: "Well, I have loved that person enough. I am done. They have just stepped across the line. They have made things awkward. They have just blown it."
- No, Paul says, "Never quit loving your brothers and sisters."
  - This does not mean that you keep exposing yourself to physical abuse or something like that!
    - No, you can and should protect yourself by appealing to authorities!
  - It also does not mean that we should not sometimes confront and discipline erring and stubborn believers.
    - Doing so, is obedience to Scripture and is a form of love as we love him or her as God calls us to!
  - But this call does not give us an excuse to write off our brother or our sister or say that we are done with them.

We should never quit loving our brother or our sister in Christ. Did you get that? May God help you do this!

2. **Notice the reason (8b–10)** – *For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

That is the call! Verse 8a makes it clear.

Now, you may ask—"Why?" "Why should I never quit loving my brother or sister?" Well, when we commit to keep doing so, we properly perform what the whole Law was calling for. **Look with me at verses 8b–10.**

The reason we should love one another is that doing so fulfills the law. Love does what the law and the commandments required!

Now, it seems that Paul picks up the teaching of Jesus here.

- In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked, “Which commandment is the most important?”
- Jesus’s masterful response is that the commands to love 1) God and 2) neighbor are the two greatest commandments in the Law.
- You see, if we properly loved, we would never sin at all.
- Now, what you might not realize is that Jesus answers this question about the 10 Commandments by citing two other texts that give commands.
  - He cites a text in Deuteronomy and another in Leviticus.
- Jesus had a profound understanding of the 10 Commandments and his answer relates to how they originally came to Israel in two tablets of stone.
  - The first tablet included the first commandments, engraved by God’s own hand, that involved “loving” God (*commands 1-4*).
    - In other words, if you are properly loving God, then you will not “have any other god before God,” will “not make for ourselves a carved image,” will “not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,” and will “remember the Sabbath day” because God rested from his work on the seventh day.
    - That is, you could use the words “Love God” as a summary for the first tablet.
  - The second tablet, written in God’s own hand, likely included commandments 5–10.
    - These commands—5) “you shall honor your father and mother,” 6) “shall not murder,” 7) “shall not commit adultery,” 8) “shall not steal,” 9) “shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” and 10) “shall not covet.”
    - This second tablet contains words about loving others, so Jesus masterfully says that this is the second greatest commandment, quoting Lev 19:18.
    - You could use the words “love neighbor” to summarize the second tablet.

Having said all of that, in our passage, Paul cites the sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth commandment, and adds the language “any other commandment.” Paul says these commandments are “summed up” in the command found in the passage Jesus cited: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- Think about the wisdom in this. If we truly love our neighbor as we do ourselves, of course, we will not murder him or her.
- We also will not steal or covet their things or commit adultery with him or her or their spouse!

To make this clear, Paul ends by saying: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” The entire second tablet of the Commandments and all these commands that have to do with how we relate to others can be fulfilled if we simply love our neighbor.

Now, I should say that Paul’s reference to loving neighbors extends his call farther than his original call to love each other. You might ask: “Well, who is my neighbor?” “Who qualifies?”

- First, I would say, “Go back and read how Jesus answered that very question in his parable of the Good Samaritan.” His point is that “neighbor” is broader than our own people—the people we like—it includes Samaritans as well.
- I would also add, I think “neighbor” in Paul’s writings includes not only one those in our church, but those in our homes, on our block, in our city, at our work, in our gym, on our vacations as well.

- That is, “neighbor” includes all those who God brings across our paths.

So, the radical call of God on your life is to never quit loving those he brings across your path! So, I ask, “Have you quit on your brother or sister? Have you stopped loving them? Have you stopped loving someone on your block or in your family?” Have you written off someone here? Will not you allow the gospel to bring reconciliation between you and your sister or brother? We must never stop loving one another!

#### D. Wake up and put armor on (13:11–14)

To this call, Paul adds a final one in verses 11–14. Now, before he gives the direct commands in the final part of this passage, he begins by reminding us of the time in which we live. That is, Paul advances through two subjects in this text: 1) the time (vv. 11–12a) and 2) the call (vv. 12b–14).

1. **Notice the time (11–12a)** – <sup>11</sup> *Beside this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.* <sup>12</sup> *The night is far gone; the day is at hand.*

So, let’s begin by identifying that time! **Look with me at verses 11 and 12a.**

Did you notice all the language about “time” in these verses (*time, hour, nearer, far gone, at hand*)? And there is a particular thing that Paul wants us to know about the hour or time in which we live. Paul utilizes several phrases in these two verses that were common, ancient “eschatological—END TIMES expressions.”<sup>280</sup>

- That is, he is using words like “time” and “hour” and “salvation” and “day” to inform us that the future coming of Jesus is near.
- Consider, for instance, the words “for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”
- That is, our future salvation from Jesus is almost here.
  - The day is “at hand.”
  - The current age is like night that is well-advanced or nearly over.
  - The day is coming, the sun is coming up!

But what do we do with these ideas regarding our future salvation and the return of the Lord? Well, to start with, we should avoid two extremes or ditches into which many believers slip. This is a pastoral word of warning about some of my observances regarding believers and the end times.

- The first ditch is the tendency of many believers to really get into these things so they can figure it all out.
  - Some of us approach eschatology the same way we do a 10,000 piece puzzle!
  - We get so into this that we can make charts and timelines to capture what we are deciphering.
  - That is not why all these things are in the Bible though.
  - They are not here for your entertainment or so that you grow a larger group of followers keyed into your system.
- Having said that, we should also avoid the other ditch as well.

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<sup>280</sup> Longenecker, *Romans*, 982.

- Many Christians do not think or talk about this much at all.
  - They see the 10,000 piece puzzle of prophecy and want nothing to do with it!
  - Unfortunately, for them, however, the soon coming of Jesus makes no practical difference in the way they live at all.
- So, they go about their lives no differently than unbelievers.
  - Sure, they might think about the future, but it is their retirement and 401ks and investment properties that they think of.
  - They give no thought about how the suddenness and nearness of the Lord's return should impact them.

So, what should we do with all this? Well, keep reading. These things should influence our lives and that is the call that Paul places on us in verses 12b–14. **Let's read those verses.**

## 2. Notice the call (12b–14)

Paul's challenge to believers here involves two commands given in the second half of verse 12.

- a. Cast off the works of darkness (12b, 13).** *So then let us cast off the works of darkness ... 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.*

First, we must respond to the nearness of our salvation by “casting off the works of darkness.”

- The words “cast off” and later “put on” allude to the practice of taking off night clothes and putting on what is appropriate to wear during the day.
- He had given clues of this earlier passage when he said that it was now time to “wake from sleep” (13:11a).
  - “Sleep” was often used in ancient times “as a negative image” since it pictured inactivity, sloth, weakness, and vulnerability.<sup>281</sup>
  - You see, Paul is confronting lethargy and laziness in our spiritual commitments and calling us to show zeal—to wake up—because we are now one day closer to seeing Jesus than we were yesterday!

So, utilizing this imagery, Paul says that it is time for all believers to cast off some old clothes. Do you have a person in your home who is obsessed with wearing comfortable clothes? You know, the second they come through the door at home, they go to their room to put on their sweats! We have a few of them!

- Well, Paul plays off this metaphor and calls us to cast off the old clothes—the “works of darkness” and then defines what he means by this in verse 13 as not walking in “orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”
- Listen, we must not participate in any of these things.
- These things cannot describe us, whether they are riotous parties, getting drunk anywhere, feeding our flesh through pornography or immoral sex, or fighting and coveting with our brothers and sisters.

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. James Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 786.

All these things must be cast off like old clothes that you would never wear in public!

- This does not mean that we can do these things privately.
- That is not it at all.
- No, we must cast off these things at all times because the day of our salvation is nearer now than it was yesterday or last year.
- Jesus might come at any time, so throw off those old things.

**b. Put on the armor of light (12c, 14).** *And put on the armor of light ... <sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

And put on something. We must put on “the armor of light.” Do you see that at the end of verse 12? Let’s read it.

What does it mean to “put on the armor of light?”

- Well, it is a bit odd in this context.
- We are not quite ready for it, but Paul turns to “warfare” imagery.
- It is not that we just have to put on good clothes.
- He does not say, “Cast off the inappropriate clothes and put on something more comfortable like sweat pants!
- No, we must put “armor” on.
- This is yet another testimony to the radical nature of Paul’s call here.
  - Some of us say, “Well, that is not very convenient.” “That is not comfortable.” “Armor is so ... rigid ... stiff ... poky ... uncomfortable!”
  - The metaphor means that we must walk in light and wear armor.
  - It is not a casual call!

Now, Paul actually helps us understand more of what he means in the final verse when he repeats the words “put on.” This time, it is put on “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- In a mysterious turn, he tells us to put someone on like clothing.
- This image is a call to embrace our commitment to and new identity wrapped in Jesus.
- This means that we let every part of our life be molded by what Jesus wants from us.

I love how Paul writes this. It is not “Put on Jesus,” but “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- This shows how fully and totally this is to be done.
- He is our Lord—our Master—and we must live our lives the way he calls us to.

In case you are still lost, Paul tells us more about what it means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ in the final part of the verse—“and make no provision to fulfill the desires of our flesh.”

This call of putting on Jesus means that we think ahead and do not afford ourselves any opportunities to fulfill the illicit desires of our sinful flesh.

- Listen, some men in our church need to hear this!
- Women need to hear this too, but some of our men need to take holiness seriously!

- You could be a pastor, or a chaplain, or a professor, or a teacher, or a small group leader, yet still need to hear this!
  - The flesh is not partial.
  - It is impartial—we all have it!
- So, considering the times—the nearness of the Lord’s return—we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision to fulfill the sinful desires of the flesh.
  - This might mean that we engage others in the battle against our flesh and ask them to help us clamp down on any source of temptation.
  - This might mean that we might give up certain things or avoid certain practices or places where we know we will be tempted.

Paul calls us to wake up, cast off the works of darkness, put on Jesus, and make absolutely no provision to fulfill the sinful desires of our flesh.

- Men and women, this call is radical!
- You cannot just be a casual or cool Christian who does some good things and avoids the most sinful things.
- No, Jesus wants all of you!
- He wants you to forsake all and follow him.
- Listen, I do not care what your occupation is ... I do not care what your income is ... I do not care what your background is ... I only care that you fully give Jesus everything as your Lord—that you follow him and walk properly as in the daytime, knowing that the hour is near—it is at hand, and that you make no provisions for the flesh.

God’s radical call on your life in Romans 13 is that 1) you never quit loving your brother or sister and that 2) you wake up and put armor on.

## **E. Commitment to Unity (14:1–15:13)**

In Romans 14–15, Paul addresses matters of Christian liberty and encourages believers to be unified. He starts, in Romans 14, by establishing important guiding principles and responsibilities. Then, in chapter 15 (verses 1–13), he prays for unity.

### **1. Principles and Responsibilities involved in Christian Liberty (14:1–23)**

I am excited to start a new section of Romans with you this morning! The new section goes from Romans 14 through the middle of chapter 15. When you think of Romans 14 and 15, you should think of “Christian liberty!” That is, Paul gives very practical instruction to the Roman believers about controversial issues that they saw differently from one another.

- Imagine the letter of Romans being read out loud to the churches of Rome!
- As believers hung on every word, I am sure that they would be deeply impacted by the rich theological truth and explanation of the gospel found throughout the first 13 chapters.
  - As I imagine these things, I think their hearts would move in reflection and pulsing, burning awe as they heard such a book!
  - But then, as they read Romans 14–15, I am sure that there would be a good bit of awkward silence and intense introspection. Some would be embarrassed. Some might internally cringe and think, “Everyone is talking about me!”

- No doubt there would be moments when these believers felt that Paul was talking directly about them!

The next few weeks we will consider different principles or lessons about the freedom that we enjoy in Christ. Paul establishes these principles through giving commands and explanations.

#### a. The “Lordship” Principle (1–12)

In the first twelve verses, Paul establishes a principle of liberty. I call it the “Lordship principle” and we will talk about it for the next two weeks.

- 1) The demand (1–3) –** <sup>1</sup> *As for the one who is weak in the faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.* <sup>2</sup> *One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.* <sup>3</sup> *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.*

In this passage, Paul starts by making God’s demand on believers quite clear. Let’s read verses 1-3. The demand is that we must “welcome” one another. They must “welcome” (προσλαμβάνετε) them, ultimately because God has “welcomed” (προσελάβετο) them. That is, we must acknowledge in our heart and our commitments something God has already acknowledged. We must respond to our brothers and sisters how God has already responded to them.

Now, to grasp the nature of this demand, we have to explore a few other things in this opening paragraph.

- **First, Paul describes more about the situation that he is addressing in verse 2.**
  - He says that there are believers who are “strong” and others who are “weak in faith.”
  - He further describes these two as some who eat anything and others who eat only vegetables. The point of the contention then is about “food.”
  - It also involves “days” as some treat all days alike and others esteem one day above the rest.
    - This information helps us understand more of the situation in the churches of Rome.
  - It seems that there were some believers—probably from a Jewish background—who were trying to continue to honor the Sabbath and were concerned to eat only meat that had been slaughtered in the proper Jewish way.<sup>282</sup>
    - Now, historically, it helps to know that all Jews in Rome had just been allowed back into the city just before Paul writes this letter.
    - So, for at least 7 years, the only believers remaining in the churches were Gentile believers who had no reservations about Jewish practices.
    - But then the Jewish believers come back and there is tension in the church.
    - So, the weak are primarily Jewish Christians.

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<sup>282</sup> John Stott agrees. He writes, “The weak were for the most part *Jewish Christians*, whose weakness consisted in their continuing conscientious commitment to Jewish regulations regarding diet and days.” Stott, *Romans*, 356. Thiselton reminds us that Paul himself was Jewish but would now shares the convictions of the strong. Cf. Thiselton, *Romans*, 237.

- Other believers—probably Gentiles in heritage—did not feel the need to honor the Sabbath, celebrate Jewish feast days, or show concern for Jewish dietary restrictions.
  - Imagine Gentile believers enjoying pork at common church meals.
    - That was alarming for Jewish people, but it was a delicacy in many Gentile cultures.<sup>283</sup>
    - Now, we should note that over the last few hundred years outsiders had put many pressures on the Jews to abandon their heritage, especially the food laws and many Jews spilled their blood instead of compromising on this very point.
    - Yet, Christianity changed that teaching!
    - Jesus himself had talked about all meat being clean and Paul will repeat that in this passage.
    - The Gospel writer Mark notes this!
    - So, theologically, it was true, but Jewish Christians might struggle rejecting this cultural marker or identity marker of their ethnicity.
    - Take note: This might be hard for us as well!
      - There are certain things that we learn from our culture that might not be required for us in our sanctification too!
      - A part of our conscience and convictions. Yet, Scripture must guide us!
  - Imagine the church “potlucks” where Gentile believers are eating ham sandwiches and hotdogs!
    - The weak say, “What’s that!” “Is that swine meat?”
    - The strong answer, “Well, what were we supposed to do?” “All the kosher slaughterhouses were shut down!”
    - The weak reply, “Have you ever heard of vegetables?” “Let me tell you about “Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!” “They did not defile themselves with meat and ate only vegetables!” “That is what YHWH would want you to do!”
  - Jewish believers might also expect worship on the Sabbath, but Gentile believers are now worshipping on Sunday.
- Now, in verse 1, Paul’s first description of the Jewish brothers who avoided meat and ate only vegetables is that they were “weak in faith.” “The weak (*sick*) in faith”
  - I can see all the children in the room saying, “See, mom! Vegetables make us weak!” Well, that is not really the point of this passage!

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<sup>283</sup> Regarding Gentiles eating pork, Schreiner writes, “Eating swine meat was especially popular and considered a delicacy in the Greco-Roman world, but this would be particularly offensive to Jews.” Schreiner, *Romans*, 708.

- This description denotes their “lack of confidence that they are free to do certain things.... They did not trust God completely and without qualification, leaning instead of the crutches of their customs and practices.”<sup>284</sup>
  - In other words, they may have felt that they needed more than Jesus to help in their walk with God.
  - Later, in the text, we will see that this likely became something that their conscience was telling them they needed to do to please God.
  - So, to be “weak in faith” is to fail to trust God completely and without qualification for what he has done for us in Jesus!
- **Second, Paul reveals what the opposite of “welcoming” a brother looks like in verse 3.**
    - Instead of welcoming or accepting their brother, the strong brother might be tempted to “despise” the weaker.
    - They think,
      - “I wish they would just get it!
      - “It is so frustrating to be around them with their constant questions!”
      - “Oh, man, who invited them!”
    - The weak brother who refrained from meat might “pass judgment on” or “look down on” the strong.
      - Why is it that sometimes the most conservative among us are also the most opinionated?
      - They think, “Well, I do not even know if they are saved!”
    - These responses are the opposite of welcoming or accepting another believer.

Paul’s main argument in these first verses involves a clear call. They are to “accept” one another—even believers who handle disputable things differently—because God has “accepted” them.

- Now, Paul repeats this call at the end of the Christian liberty passage as well. **Look with me at 15:7.** We are to “welcome” one another as Christ “welcomed” us.

We are called to embrace our brothers and sisters with open arms. Paul qualifies the way we do this—it is not to quarrel over opinions. We cannot just welcome someone into fellowship so that we can argue with them or convince them of our own way! No, we must unqualifyingly welcome them!

## 2) The rationale (4–12)

Now, it might be hard for us to just accept other believers who see things sometimes very differently than us. So, on what basis should I do so? How can I feel confident in doing so?

Well, in the remainder of this first section, Paul gives rationale or justification for welcoming our brothers as God has welcomed them. His rationale is two-fold, and both sections start with rhetorical questions (see v. 4a; 10a).

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<sup>284</sup> Abernathy, *Romans*, 269.

- a) **You must welcome other believers because they are under Jesus's lordship (4–9).** <sup>4</sup> *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.* <sup>5</sup> *One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.* <sup>6</sup> *The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.* <sup>7</sup> *For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.* <sup>8</sup> *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* <sup>9</sup> *For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.*

First, we must welcome other believers because they are under *Jesus's* lordship. As we read through verses 4–9, look for the times that Paul uses the word “Lord” (κύριος; 9xs). **Read verses 4–9.**

The passage starts out with a stark question: **“Who are you?”**

- The word “you” is set out in an emphatic way and almost puts any person who passes judgment against a believer as God.
- Then Paul quickly turns a metaphor about masters and servants into a discussion of how both strong brothers and weak brothers answer to the Lord.
- As a matter of fact, the word “master” is the same word for “lord” in this passage.
- Much of this is further explanation of the Roman situation with both brothers thinking they are doing the right thing.

I want to emphasize two points about lordship, however.

- **First, do not fail to recognize the beauty of what Paul says at the end of verse 4.** It says, “And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”
  - This glorious assurance should not be lost.
  - If we fear about some believer who sees things far differently from us, we should remember the power of Christ to keep him or her.
  - This gets to the heart of some of our judgmental thoughts about people who disagree with us about matters of conviction and choice and non-essentials.
    - We wonder if they will even be in heaven!
    - This passage, however, assures us!

I love the song, “He will hold me fast.”

*When I fear my faith will fail  
Christ will hold me fast  
When the tempter would prevail  
He will hold me fast*

*I could never keep my hold  
Through life's fearful path*

*For my love is often cold  
He must hold me fast*

*He will hold me fast  
He will hold me fast  
For my Saviour loves me so  
He will hold me fast*

*Those He saves are His delight  
Christ will hold me fast  
Precious in His holy sight  
He will hold me fast*

*He'll not let my soul be lost  
His promises shall last  
Bought by Him at such a cost  
He will hold me fast*

We love this for what it means for “me”, but this is true of your brother!

What we need to understand is that the weakest believer has the greatest supernatural power in the world working in him or her to make them stand!

- **Second, and perhaps most importantly, notice Paul’s perspective on how believers relate to Jesus.** He is their Lord and consequently our existence is for him.
  - You see, Paul is not as concerned that everyone agrees in this passage as he is about believers loving and accepting one another and living under the lordship of Jesus. And that relationship—being under Jesus’s lordship—involves ownership.
  - As the end of verse 8 says, “Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”
    - You see, after Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the grave God exalted him to his right hand and he received a name that is above every name.
    - One day all humanity will exalt him as Lord—Sovereign Ruler.
    - **Read Phil 2:9–11.**
    - That is what Paul is talking about in Rom 14:9. **Read it.**

But how should Christ’s lordship over us impact us today? Notice that Paul’s perspective is that both weak and strong believers acknowledge his lordship when they eat. When they eat, they both “give thanks to God.” What an interesting way to be reminded of Christ’s Lordship over you!

But I think this constant citation of Jesus’s lordship in a passage about liberty helps in another way.

- Paul realizes that it would be a common temptation for the reader to see that the stronger Christian is free to eat and drink whatever he or she wants and think, “Yeah! If I am strong, then I am free.”
- You see, when immature believers come to this passage, they do so for proof texts that prove their freedom!

- “There it is, Paul says, ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself’” (14a).
- “I am free!”
- But the question we need to ask is: **“Free to do what?”**
- And the answer comes out clearly—“Free to serve your Lord!”

You see, if you know Jesus as your Savior, then you have one master, and it is not “you.”

- You are not someone else’s master, and you are not even your own master!
- Jesus is our Master!

- In all matters—even what I eat or drink or how I live a day—I am the Lord’s.
- I am his!

So, this frees us not to judge other brothers or despise them for what they do in liberty issues!

- If we could only just get it into our heads—they only have one master and it is Jesus!
  - They are not responsible to me!
  - They are responsible to Him!
  - Who am I to seize Jesus’ position?
  - “I did not die to become their Lord.” “He did!”
  - So, as you consider your liberty, remember His Lordship!

**b) You must welcome other believers because they will stand before God’s judgment (10–12).** <sup>10</sup> *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;* <sup>11</sup> *for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”* <sup>12</sup> *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

We come back together again to continue our focus on Paul’s teaching about harmony between weaker and stronger believers in matters of Christian liberty. ***Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 14.***

In Romans 14–15, Paul deals with a situation that was occurring between Jewish and Gentile brothers and sisters in the churches of Rome.

- Strife had risen over diet and days.
- Some felt that they could only eat vegetables and had to honor Jewish ceremonial days.
  - They were the “weak in faith.”
  - Their faith was weak, it had deficiencies.
  - They failed to trust that Jesus was enough in their walk with God.
  - They also become judgmental. They put their judgments—their scruples—on others and became the legislators of the church!
    - Sadly, the church today still has brothers and sisters who pass judgments and require everyone to assent to their positions in such liberty issues.
    - It is my prayer that we do not function this way as a church!
    - We must put only biblical mandates down on others in the church.

- Listen, you can have personal standards because of your past lifestyle or your conscience—that can be necessary—but you must not force those on others or judge them if they disagree with you!
- I remember hearing a preacher force something like this on believers.
  - He said that playing cards was always wrong and that believers should never do it.
  - He said something about “jokers” and “jacks” and “the Devil” and then condemned believers if they played cards.
  - Missing, however, in the sermon was any clear scriptural support!
  - Listen, some might need to follow this counsel because of their past lifestyle or conscience, but it should not be pressed down on others unless there is clear scriptural warrant for it!
- What this preacher did with cards can also be done with other items (*boy I could give you a few other areas of liberty as well! [movie theaters, drinking wine, music]*), but I do not want to distract with controversy right at the beginning of the sermon!
- You see, in any group there will be things that mark out who insiders and who outsiders are!
- Christianity, it should be the Bible—not our own views!
- So, some were not eating meat!
- Others, however, knew that they could eat whatever kind of meat they wanted and did not feel the need to honor the Sabbath.
  - They were convinced of this!
  - But Paul instructs them not to despise their more conservative brothers.
  - Paul will tell them other ways they must minister to their weaker brothers throughout the rest of chapter 14.

But, into the heart of this debate, at the very beginning of his argument, Paul calls these believers to “welcome” one another as God welcomed them, laying out two different reasons why (the “rationale”) they should do so.

- Now, “welcoming” means that they treat each other with warmth.
- The rare word is used in Acts 28 of the way that the islanders on Malta received Paul and his company when they were shipwrecked.
- They made a fire for them, treated them with care and warmth, and provided for them as if they were family.
- This is how believers in the church should treat one another even if they disagree with us on liberty issues.

Now the first reason we should welcome one another is because all believers are under the lordship of Jesus. I call this the “Lordship principle” of Christian liberty.

- That is, Jesus is the only Lord of our brothers and sisters.
  - We are not their lord.
  - They do not give an account to us!
- We further learned that Jesus is able to make them stand!

- They will be upheld.
- The power of God in Christ will keep them, so we do not need to judge them.
- Jesus is their only rightful Lord.
  - He died and was raised to become the Lord of both the dead and the living.
  - He has been in both arenas—among the dead and the living—and his victory over death makes him the rightful Lord of both the dead and the living.
  - So, we should not pass judgment on them like we are their Lord.

Today, we come to another reason why we must welcome other believers and that is because they all will stand before God's judgment. This argument is made in verses 10–12—three short but significant verses. We will make our whole message out of them this morning.

Paul moves through this passage in three distinct stages. He starts with an implicit command (10a), moves to an explicit reason (10b–11), and concludes with a final statement (12).

**1) An implicit command (10a) – <sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?**

Paul begins here with two questions that call out weaker and stronger believers who might mistreat their brother.

- “You” is in the emphatic position again in both questions.
- These questions almost read, “You” and “You.”
- Why do you do this to your brother?

Now, Paul has commands implicit in these questions! Paul makes statements with these questions. Have you ever had someone ask you a question that seemed more like a statement?

Maybe your parents asked, “Did you think it was a good idea to be in that parking lot late at night?” “Why did you hit your brother with his toy truck?”

That is what Paul does here. He means that we must not pass judgment on or despise our brothers!

**2) An explicit reason (10b–11)**

Now, Paul adds an explicit reason why they must not judge or despise their brothers and sisters in verses 10b–11. The reason itself is stated clearly in verse 10b. **Look there with me.**

- **The Reason (10b) –** *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*

After these two questions, Paul explains why it is absurd for us to pass judgment on our brothers and sisters. One day each of us will stand before a real judgment! Paul

refers to that judgment as “God’s judgment seat.” Now, I want to say some important things about this.

- **First, a handful of NT texts describe the future judgment of believers.** Four passages deal with this subject: Revelation 4–5, 1 Cor 3:10–17, 2 Cor 5:1–10, and Rom 14:10–12. If you want to explore everything that the NT says about it, these would be the texts that you would need to consider. Let me say a few words about the three other texts.
  - **1 Cor 3:10–17** – In a passage where Paul is instructing ministers about how they build the church, he explains that at the future judgment some builders will gain reward while others suffer loss. He explains that if anyone defiles the church, God will defile him. If anyone destroys God’s church, then God will destroy him. What seems obvious in this text is that the work of Christians will be examined at a time of future judgment called the judgment seat of Christ (v.13 - “*Each one’s work will be made manifest, for the Day will disclose it*”).
  - **2 Cor 5:9–10** – This text reads: <sup>9</sup> *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.* <sup>10</sup> *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* In this passage, Paul reveals his motivation for how he lives in this world. He explains that knowing that he will be judged according to the good and the evil that he does informs the way that he lives.
  - **Revelation 4–5** – These two chapters describe worship around the throne of God and the Lamb. Elders clothed in white garments cast their crowns before the Lord. While we do not learn much about how the judgment unfolds, this passage makes it clear that there is reward and that those rewards are cast at the feet of the one who makes our faithfulness possible. When this passage is combined with events later in the book of Revelation (chs. 19–20), it leads many to believe that there will be a time of judgment for the church and a later time of judgment for unbelievers. That is, there is a judgment seat where believers are judged at the Bema judgment and a Great White Throne judgment when unbelievers will be judged and sent to the Lake of Fire.
- **Second, the “judgment seat” was a well-known place of judgment.** The word behind “judgment seat” is the Greek word “bema,” which was a well-known place of judgment in Roman cities. It normally speaks of a raised stone platform in the heart of the city (*like Corinth, for instance*) where governors or judges would hear cases. So, Paul uses this earthly imagery to describe our future heavenly judgment before God.
- **Finally, this time of judgment involves *ultimate, personal* accountability for the way believers live their lives.**

Throughout the years, several suggestions have been made about what this judgment is based on:

- 1-Some say that it is based on the character of our life and actions (*International Critical Commentary*).
- 2-Some say our faithfulness (*Colin Kruse - Tyndale New Testament Commentary*).
- 3-Some say the presence or absence of faith (*Lenski*).
- 4-Others say obedience and disobedience (*Ralph Martin - Word Biblical Commentary Series*).
- 5-Others say our commitment to the Lord (*Victor Furnish - Anchor Bible Commentary*).<sup>285</sup>

Well, it is best to see this judgment not as a judgment for the obtaining of salvation. It is a matter of individual reward for those who are saved. Believers will be held accountable for what they did in their body while they lived on earth (see 2 Cor 5:10). This accountability motivates Paul and should us as well!

- **The Scripture (11)** – <sup>11</sup> *For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

Next, Paul bases his understanding of the future judgment of believers on an OT text that he often cites in passages like this. Paul introduces a quote of Isaiah 45 in verse 11 with the words “for it is written.” Do you see that?

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles to this text. This is a more important text than we might realize! When Paul presents his views of the future judgment, he often has this text in his mind! Of all the texts in the OT, Isaiah 45 forms the backbone of Paul’s view of judgment. I want to look especially at verses 18–25. We will emphasize its main message along the way.

- First, there is a declaration (vv. 18–21). Within these verses we read of the uniqueness of God. Over and over again, Isaiah declares that there is “no one like God.”
- Then there is a call (v. 22). God calls everyone to turn and be saved.
- Next, there is an oath (v. 23). God takes an oath—he makes a promise. What is the promise? It is that every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. This is the part that Paul cites in Rom 14:11.
- Finally, there is a response (vv. 24–25). Isaiah describes how the angry acknowledge the Lordship of Yahweh (v. 24) and how the offspring of Israel respond (v. 25). That is, so everyone will acknowledge God’s Lordship.

Now, we know that this is often on Paul’s mind because he alludes to this passage in Philippians 2 as well.

- Within that text, Paul applies Isaiah 45 to Jesus and the universal acknowledgment of his lordship.
- This is no problem at all because the Father has committed all judgment over to the Lord.
- That is also why it is appropriate for Paul to describe this as the “judgment seat of Christ” in 1 Corinthians and calls it the “judgment seat of God” in Romans.

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<sup>285</sup> Abernathy has an excellent review of these positions in his exegetical summary of 2 Corinthians, page 198.

- Which is it? Both. It is the same thing!

So, Paul proves that every one of us will stand before God's judgment seat by quoting this significant text—Isaiah 45.

### 3) A final statement (12) – <sup>12</sup> *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Finally, in our passage, Paul concludes with a final statement: "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God."

Although he is the great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul realizes that he will join with us to give an account of how we lived our lives. Each of us will answer. One day, heaven's books—the records—will be opened and Christians will be judged for how they live their lives. Paul says in another place: "Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it" (1 Cor 3:13). You see, every one of you will stand and give an account of your life. You are going to give an account! Do you realize that? You might object, "Is that old doctrine still true? Are you still going to teach that?" Well, Scripture holds true forever. This statement must affect us—how we live, what we do.

So, because we face judgment at God's judgment seat, we need not bother to pass our own judgments on our brothers and sisters. In another place, when Paul is forced to defend his own ministry against critics, says this: "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God" (1 Cor 4:5).

This is then yet another example of how we must allow our sure future to come upon and influence our current situation. It must press down on and overwhelm how we live. My former advisor said that it must squash the present! We must welcome our brothers and sisters in the church and not judge them for how they live in matters of liberty.

## b. Responsibilities for the Strong (13–23)

In the second half of Romans 14, Paul appeals specifically to those in the congregations of Rome who were strong. That is, Paul appeals to those who have a healthy and proper view of theology—more specifically, those who understood more clearly what Jesus accomplished in the cross and resurrection to free us from sin and the law. ***Let's read verses 13–23 with that perspective in mind.***

Paul puts the primary responsibility for unity on strong, healthy believers. More specifically, he lays responsibilities on them. Now, before we look at each of these in detail, I want to illustrate the way that Paul argues in this passage.

- Imagine with me that your friend is walking down the aisle of a store and comes across a small, lost child.
  - So, what would you expect your friend to do? What would be acceptable? What would be appropriate? Would it be right to just keep on going? Is that enough?
- Or, what if your friend finds an elderly woman in the parking lot who drops her groceries, and they begin to scatter in the wind?

- What should he do?
- What must he do?
- By the way, dads, have you trained your sons and daughters to care for the innocent, the weak, and the elderly?
  - Your friend should stop what he is doing and help the weak. That might mean 1) getting the elderly woman to safety, 2) carefully collecting as much of the groceries as possible, and 3) putting them in her cart or vehicle.
  - That sort of response is something that would honor God—it would be acceptable to him—and it would be approved by our culture (*“approved by men”*).
- Now, what would you do if you saw your child (*with a group of friends*) intentionally put an obstacle in the path of a physically handicapped person?
  - What if your child put a large stone or rock in the way of a blind person?
  - What sort of discipline or training would be necessary?
  - By the way, the Law had a few things to say about putting a stumbling block in the way of a blind person!

So, in our passage today, Paul is like a dad training his children about how they must care for the weak! The responsibilities are regarding our brother (vv. 13–15) and the situation itself (vv. 16–23). We will consider the first section today!

### 1) Responsibilities regarding our brothers (13–15)

At the beginning of this section, in verses 13–15, Paul has a lot to say about the way the stronger believer treats his weaker brother. He gives three specific commands with some explanations connected to the final command.

#### a) **Do not pronounce judgments on them (13a).** <sup>13</sup> *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer.*

In the first command, Paul repeats an important point he has already made. Paul says that we must “not pass judgment (κρίνωμεν) on one another any longer.”

- Earlier, that command was intended specifically for the weaker brother.
- He must not sit in judgment on his brother who eats meat and fails to honor significant days.
- Now, Paul broadens it to every believer and maybe even specifically to the stronger brother.
  - I believe that is the case because the final part of the verse calls him not to put a stumbling block in the way of your brother.
  - That advice is especially important for the stronger brother.
  - We will say more about that later, but, for now, know that Paul calls us not to pronounce judgments on our brothers.
    - That is not our right!
    - It is premature and inappropriate—That is the Lord’s job!

**b) Do not trip them up (13b).** *But rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.*

Instead, the stronger—those more mature in the faith—must “decide” (κρίνατε) something.

- The word “decide” actually comes from the same word for “pass judgment” that is used in the first half of the verse and throughout the passage.
- Instead, of judging your brother, you must make a judgment about something else.
- You must decide never to put a “stumbling block” (πρόσκομμα) or “hindrance” (σκάνδαλον) in the path of your brother.
  - These two words are synonymous and were used of literal objects that cause someone to fall but came to be used in the NT metaphorically of a spiritual downfall.<sup>286</sup>
  - For instance, Paul uses the word for “hindrance” in 1 Corinthians 1 concerning how the cross was something the Jewish people could not accept.
  - They tripped over it because a cross meant a curse.
  - From their perspective, the Messiah could not have been crucified!

In our passage, the stronger brother must determine not to allow his freedom to become something that makes his weaker brother stumble in some way. Doing so, is to abuse weakness. Like putting a rock in front of a blind man! To learn more about how they might trip, we must keep reading. **Look with me at verses 14 and 15.**

**c) Do not destroy them (14–15).**

Now, these two verses help us know more about the situation that Paul imagines. He imagines a weaker brother being grieved by what a stronger brother eats.

Now, the structure of Paul’s argument in these verses and throughout the rest of the passage is quite challenging!

- It was a difficult week of study for me! This passage felt jumbled and repetitive.
- I kept asking God: What is Paul’s argument? How has he arranged it? What should be our take-a-ways?
- By God’s grace, it became clearer to me last night and early this morning.

So, let me show you how Paul arranges his argument.

- We have already considered two commands, and Paul ends this section with a third in verse 15b.
- Before he commands, however, Paul gives some explanation (vv. 14–15a).
- This is how he will move through the rest of the passage as well—he will organize the rest of his instructions around alternating explanations and commands (*show “commands” in 15b, 16, 19, 20a, 22a*).

The explanations prepare for or justify the commands.

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<sup>286</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 851.

- **Explanations (14–15a)**

So, in our passage, Paul starts with three important explanations in verses 14–15a.

- **First, all food and drink are fundamentally clean (14a).** <sup>14</sup> *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.*

In verse 14, Paul clearly expresses his confidence that nothing is unclean in itself.

- Now, in this context, it is best to remember that Paul is talking about food.
  - All food is clean.
  - He is sure of it.
- Now, the way that Paul is so sure of this can be seen in the little phrase “in the Lord Jesus” (ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ).
- While there are different ways to take this phrase, it is better to translate it “by” the Lord Jesus.
  - I am not just saying this independently—some English translations take it that way (CSB; KJV; NKJV).
- So, Jesus is the agent who made this known to Paul.
- Jesus taught this to Paul!
- Now, Paul might be describing something that he had learned from Jesus’s teaching.<sup>287</sup>
  - Perhaps Paul has a passage like Mark 7 in mind!
  - In that text, Jesus makes this clear, and the Gospel writer, Mark, explains, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (7:19b).
  - So, it is clear—Christ said it, Mark explained, and now Paul writes.
  - All food is clean.
  - We can eat any kind of meat that we desire.

Yet, this might be hard for a Jewish believer to accept!

- They had been trained by the law—Leviticus & Deuteronomy—that they had to be careful with meat!
- For instance, do you remember what Peter later said?
- Peter, who heard explanations about this from Jesus himself, later struggled with this!
  - As a matter of fact, he received a vision that told him to “Rise Peter, kill, and eat.”
  - But Peter said, “*Not so Lord, I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*”
  - And then the heavenly voice replied, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (cf. Acts 10:13–15).

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<sup>287</sup> Cf. Longenecker, *Romans*, 1007.

But Paul's point is that believers are now free from the Law of Moses. It no longer reigns over us because Jesus fulfilled it for us! We have already considered this. This does not mean that the Law is not profitable for us—it is! It still reveals God to us. But we are no longer under its reign and are no longer obligated to obey it!

So, fundamentally, the issue that Paul considers here is an “amoral” thing. It is something that is neither right nor wrong! This is an important point!

- Paul is talking about meat here.
  - It is muscle mass with a little fat mixed in!
  - That is what is on the table!
  - He is not saying that believers have the freedom to engage in sinful things!
  - That is important because we sometimes like to say that we have freedom to do things that are clearly condemned in the Scriptures.
- We like to consider things in the sphere of liberty, not the sphere of holiness and sin.
- **Second, food and drink are unclean for those who think it's unclean (14b).** *But it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.*

But then Paul makes another point at the end of verse 14—“But it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean.” So, what does that mean? How could that be true?

Well, Paul means that meat is not always clean for everyone!

- Some Jewish Christians may have felt that the regulation established in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were still in effect.
- If believers actually felt this way for whatever reason, then Paul explains that they would be defiled if they eat.
- That is, if our conscience tells us that something is wrong, then it would be a sin to continue unless you become convinced differently from the Bible.

Let me make a recommendation to you here! I recommend a book called *Conscience*, written by Andy Naselli and J.D. Crowley.

- In their book, the authors warn against going against our conscience.
- Doing so, is very dangerous because sin is deceitful and damning.
- They also explain, however, that the conscience can be wrong.
- It might be off and not match up with scripture.
- You might recall their illustration of a conscience that is somewhat off.
  - They use the illustration of a bathroom scale that always measures five pounds off.
  - That is, there is an objective standard—the truth—of what someone actually weighs.
  - If the scale is five pounds off, then what do you do?
    - You calibrate it.

- You turn the little wheel at the bottom of the scale, so it measures properly.
- That is what we do with our conscience.
- We adjust it to what the Bible says—the objective truth of Scripture.

Unless we do that, however, we should always obey the prompting of our conscience. If we violate conscience, it is sin.

- **Third, if we grieve our brother by our liberty practices, then we lack love (15a).**  
<sup>15</sup> *For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.*

Before getting to the command at the end of verse 15, Paul has one more important explanation to make at the beginning of the verse. **Let's read 15a.**

As Paul unfolds the situation, he considers a weak brother being “grieved” (λυπεῖται) by what his stronger brother eats. Now, this is a very strong word that means to be “vexed” or “distressed” by something. Paul uses it in 2 Cor 2:2 when he considers the “painful” and “sorrowful” experience that he has with the Corinthian church, and he uses it of the “intense grieving” that unbelievers experience when someone dies (cf. 1 Thess 4).

So, Paul says, “If your brother is grieved by what you eat, then you are no longer walking in love.” We then lack love and that is a problem! Do you remember that Paul's focus in the last section began and ended with love (See 12:9–10; 13:8, 9b, 10)? If we do not love, then we miss the greatest commandments!

As Paul explains things at the beginning of verse 15, he points out that love is more important than defending or using your liberty! Think about this! Have you ever “won an argument before” only to “wound a friendship?” Perhaps, some husbands in the room have done this to their wife. They dug in to prove that they were right only to hurt their wife! Which is more important—winning the argument or possibly wounding your wife? How about your brother?

That is Paul's explanation here! You are not walking in love if you grieve your brother!

- **Command (15b) –** *By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.*

That is when Paul explains how a weaker brother might be destroyed by the way that the stronger believer insists on his freedom. Paul does not explain it fully here, but it's likely that he imagines a Jewish believer eating the meat with the Gentile believer but going against his conscience. Such violation is dangerous because it is sin that could lead to the ruin of the weaker believer—the one for whom Christ died! What matters more to you, food, freedom, or Jesus's death on the cross?

The bigger point is that the stronger believer must not harm the weaker brother. If Jesus was willing to die for him or her, let's not let our freedoms destroy them. In what ways? Do not pass judgment. Do not trip them up. Do not destroy them with your liberty.

## 2) Responsibilities regarding the situation (16–23)

Last week, we began to look at the end of Romans 14.

- There is a long paragraph that goes from verses 13–23 where Paul makes appeals to the strong believer.
- His appeals have to do with how he treats the weaker believer (vv. 13–15) and, more generally, the whole situation involving his liberty (vv. 16–23).
  - Paul gives three commands for how he treats his weaker brother and follows with four commands about the situation.
  - Woven around the commands are notes of explanation and justification.
  - Having already considered the three commands about how strong believers must relate to their weaker brothers and sisters, we move this week to consider the four final commands that he extends to them about the situation.

Do you remember studying or cramming for a test or a certification?

- In most situations, a student will produce a study guide with possible questions and answers.
- Well, imagine that Paul asks us an essay question here: How should I use my Christian liberty or freedom?
- And, so, in *our* study guide, we study this passage and come up with four answers:
- How to pass the test!

- 1-Do not give people reasons to criticize you in your liberty choices (16–18).
- 2-Seek peace and mutual edification (19).
- 3-Do not destroy God's work (20–21).
- 4-If necessary, be content with private freedoms (22–23).

So, let's look at these four and ask God to work them into us!

**a) First, do not give people reason to criticize you (16–18).**

The first command and its explanatory notes come in verses 16–18. ***Let's read them.***

- **Command (16)** – <sup>16</sup> *So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.*

Paul begins this section by giving the command in verse 16.

- The command is about good and evil.
- Paul has already written about good and evil in Romans 12–13 (12:9b, 21; 13:3).
- In this section, however, he calls stronger believers not to let their good—their Christian freedom—become something for which another criticizes them.
- If Christians are more concerned about food and drink choices than they are their brothers and sisters, then they might receive just criticism.

So, Paul says do not let your practices bring you criticism.

- **Explanations (17–18)**

To this command, Paul attaches two explanatory notes.

- **First, God’s kingdom consists of *spiritual* virtues not *physical* desires (17).** <sup>17</sup> *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Paul’s first explanation functions as a reason. In verse 17, he gives the “theological underpinnings” for the imperative.<sup>288</sup> Food and drink are secondary, trivial, and insignificant, and they are nowhere near as important as the spiritual realities that God accomplishes in his kingdom.

The “kingdom” (βασιλεία) is an important theme of the NT. Let me point out two significant things about how it is used in the NT and this passage.

- First, the “kingdom” is emphasized more in the Synoptics than it is in Paul’s writings.
  - “Kingdom” is used 105 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke but only 14 times in Paul’s letters.
  - As a matter of fact, this is not only the first occurrence of “kingdom” in Romans, it is also the only occurrence in Romans.
  - How could that be—a book that expounds on every aspect of the gospel only uses it once?
    - Well, Paul’s view of the “kingdom” is primarily something future (see *1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:5; 2 Tim 4:1*).
    - Although that is the case, Paul calls believers to live in light of their future inheritance and participation in the kingdom of God.
    - The argument goes like this: Since God’s kingdom involves certain spiritual realities, start exercising/pursuing those things right now (e.g. *1 Cor 4:20*)! “For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.”
    - So, although he does not use “kingdom” often, when he does, it is a significant future hope that drives our behavior today!
- Second, the reality of God’s kingdom calls us to focus not on trivial things like food and drink.
  - Instead, we must center on things that will matter in God’s kingdom—“righteousness,” “peace,” and “joy” produced by God’s Spirit.
  - Now, the mention of “food” and “drink” does not surprise us in this context, but we might wonder: Where do “righteousness, joy, and peace” come from?
  - Well, let’s look at each word and then try to answer how Paul arrived at these things.
    - Righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) – This speaks of “right standing.”
      - We have seen the word “righteousness” many times in Romans so far.

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<sup>288</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 856.

- It is used 56 times in the book.
  - This is a book about “right standing”—about being made just or right with God and with our brothers and sisters.
  - Sometimes, “righteousness” is used to describe something God is fundamentally.
    - He is right; He is just.
  - This is what he is and does—“righteousness, justice.”
  - This is also what he gives to sinners through the gospel—“right standing with God and our brothers and sisters.”
  - So, it should be no surprise to us that a fundamental characteristic of God’s kingdom is justice and right relationships.
- Peace (εἰρήνη) – Peace is something that only God can give!
- In Romans 8, we learned that “the mindset of our flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace.”
  - That is, what the Spirit does for us brings “life and peace.”
  - Peace is “well-being” or a “sense of well-being.”
  - It is harmony and tranquility.
  - Its opposite is “anxiety.”
  - So, when we sacrifice our personal freedoms to protect and build up a weak, vulnerable believer, we show forth the harmony and well-being that will be characteristic of God’s kingdom.
- Joy (χαρὰ) – Finally, God’s kingdom also involves “joy.”
- You will know you are experiencing God’s kingdom when you have great personal joy or delight.
  - The opposite of joy, according to 2 Cor 2:3, is “pain, grief, or sorrow.”
  - So, if we destroy our brothers and sisters because we insist on our personal freedoms, the joy of our community is minimized.
  - The corporate gathering of believers in Jesus should be the most joyous assembly anywhere!
    - We live in a time of large gatherings and rallies that supposedly show harmony and joy, but deep peace and joy produced by God’s Spirit is what the church experiences together in Christ!
- And Paul connects each of these things—righteousness, peace, joy—to the Holy Spirit.
    - They come “by the Holy Spirit.”
    - The Spirit produces these so we may glorify God.
  - But where did Paul get this idea?
    - **Well, let’s turn to Matthew 6.**
    - Do you remember this chapter?
    - Yes, this is in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount.

- Jesus is preaching!
- In his sermon, Jesus gives a call not to be anxious about provisions (vv. 25–34).
- **Let's read those verses.**
- In this passage, Jesus illustrates how God cares for the birds of the air (v. 26a) and the lilies of the field (v. 28b) and then explains that God will care for us as well (vv. 26c, 30).
- In this sermon, he says not to worry about what we “eat” or “drink.” Did you know that? **Look at verses 25a and 31.**
- Well, that is interesting!
- Perhaps, you have committed to memory what Jesus says in Matt 6:33. **Read it.**
- In this text, we must seek “the kingdom of God” and his “righteousness.”
- These are the same words that Paul uses.
- So, Paul uses the words eat, drink, kingdom of God, and righteousness from this record of Jesus’s sermon!
- But then, why does Paul mention “peace” and “joy”? Well, that is likely his iteration of the opposite of anxiety.
- So, what is the take-a-way?
  - In both these texts, we have evidence of the Spirit of God leading Jesus and Paul to explain the fundamental nature of God’s kingdom.
  - We must not focus on things like food and drink.
  - Instead, we must seek first the kingdom.
  - That is, we must make choices about things that promote right standing, peace, and joy with one another.

So, Paul says do not function in liberty choices on the basis of trivial, physical things like “food” and “drink,” but significant, spiritual qualities. Live in light of what God values in His kingdom.

Now, it might be possible to critique our time so far in Romans 14 and 15 with a desire for more practical ways that their situation affects ours.

- What is our meat?
  - What kinds of situations does this affect in our lives?
  - And there is probably some merit to that criticism.
  - But Paul focuses us instead on timeless explanations or priorities that can help us in any situation we encounter!
  - If you could just get this—if you could live in light of this—this way of thinking—if these values—press themselves down on you—then the Spirit will produce good through you in every life situation!
- **Second, selflessly serving Christ in this way brings approval (18).** <sup>18</sup> *Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*

As a matter of fact, Paul offers that note in verse 18. **Read it.**

If you live “in this way” (“thus”)—if you live in light of God’s kingdom today—then you will be “acceptable to God” (εὐάρεστος τῷ θεῷ) and “approved by men” (δόκιμος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις).

- The word “thus” points back to verses 16 and 17.
  - If you serve Christ by giving no one reason to criticize you because you live by Kingdom values, then you are acceptable to God and approved by men.
  - Not only will God approve of what you are doing, then men and women will approve of your behavior as well.
  - This verse affirms that selfless use of liberty because of kingdom values indeed pleases God.

**b) Second, seek peace and mutual edification (19).** <sup>19</sup> *So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

That leads us to Paul’s next command in verse 19. It stands by itself as a summary conclusion to what we have already seen. So, I call it here as a second command for the situation that the stronger believer experiences. ***Let’s read verse 19.***

So, we must not give people any reason to criticize us, *and* we must seek peace and mutual edification.

- In verse 19, Paul concludes that we must pursue or seek after something.
- In our liberty practices, we must not pursue our favorite foods but should seek things that preserve well-being and mutual edification.
- He has already told stronger believers not to “destroy” their brother.
- This could be translated “tear down.”
- Instead, we must build up our brothers in the way we live sacrificially.

**c) Third, do not destroy God’s work (20–21).**

The next command is: “Do not destroy God’s work.” That command is found in verse 20.

- This command is one we have seen before.
- In verse 15b, Paul already commanded “do not destroy,” but here the object is different.
- In that verse, we learned that we must not destroy our brother.
- Here it is “the work of God.”
  - This helps us understand that God’s work involves our Christian brothers.
  - There is a sense in which destroying our weaker brother is destroying God’s work.

But here we see that Paul is moving away from considering our brother to the situation more broadly. So, Paul’s third command involving the situation is established directly in v. 20a, and then Paul connects explanations in verses 20b–21. ***Let’s begin with the command itself in verse 20a.***

- **Command (20a)** – <sup>20</sup> *Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.*

Destroying is the antonym of building. This speaks of the act of “tearing down or causing ruin.”<sup>289</sup> So, we must not find ourselves in direct opposition to God and His work. That will not end well for us!

- **Explanations (20b–21)** – *Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.* <sup>21</sup> *It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*

To this command, Paul adds explanations in verses 20b–21. **Read vv. 20b–21.**

Paul’s explanations start with an affirmation that everything—all food and drink—is indeed clean—all kinds of food and drink *are* acceptable. Now, two other items in his explanation require our attention. One item is controversial; the other is emphatic.

- First, in the list of things that are clean or unclean, Paul mentions “drinking wine” (πλεῖν οἶνον) in verse 21.
  - This is the controversial one for us!
  - We live in a day and age where drinking is controversial to evangelical Christians in America.
  - Some of that has to do with our own cultural setting and values and some of that has to do with the dangers of alcohol and alcoholism.
  - But, if you allow me, I would like to say a few things about drinking wine as it is used in this passage. Please know that I am aware that there are likely many different views on this challenging subject in the church. Please give me room to express what I feel might be going on in this passage even if you do not agree with where I come out on it.
- First, “drinking wine” was controversial for some reason in the churches of Rome.
  - Paul does not really give us more than that here.
  - It may be that some believers were objecting because the wine may have been associated with idolatrous worship.<sup>290</sup>
  - Personally, I do not really see any other indications that idolatry was a concern that Paul addresses in Romans 14–15.
  - Instead, some Jewish believers probably were offended by it for some other unnamed reason.
  - Regardless, it was apparently a matter of some dispute in Rome.
- Second, Paul mentions drinking wine alongside eating meat as technically things that were clean.

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<sup>289</sup> Harvey, *Romans*, 342.

<sup>290</sup> Moo writes that “they were afraid that the wine had been contaminated by association with pagan religious practices.” Moo, *Romans*, 856. Dunn says, “It is much more likely that a scrupulousness which avoided all meat also avoided wine, not least in case it had been offered in libation to the gods before being sold in the market.” Dunn, *Romans 8–16*, 827. Thielman agrees, “Wine too could have been tainted by the custom of tipping part of it to the ground as a libation to the gods.” Thielman, *Romans*, 648.

- That much seems to be the implication of verses 20 and 21.
- All throughout the passage, Paul keeps saying that “eating meat” is fine.
  - Meat is clean.
  - Nothing is unclean.
  - So, technically, Paul puts drinking wine in the category of clean.
- Having said that, a few other things must also be noted.
  - First, the scriptures warn repeatedly of the dangers of “strong drink” or “alcohol” (e.g. *Prov 20:1; Hos 4:11; Isa 5:11, 22; Prov 23:29–35*).
  - Further, the scriptures also completely forbid “intoxication” or “drunkenness” (e.g. *Eph 5:8; Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 6:9–10*).
- With those warnings in mind, Paul does seem to place drinking wine alongside eating meat as technically something that is clean.
  - Now, this is where some evangelicals point out differences between First Century wine and the types of alcohol that are manufactured today.
  - They express that their wine was different and weaker than much that we have access to today.
  - This disclaimer is a controversial one among American believers. Some believe it; others do not.
  - Needless to say, drinking wine is a controversial matter in the First Century and among evangelical, American believers today.
- But there is one other important point to see in this text: Finally, although the Roman believers had freedom to eat meat and drink wine, Paul says that they should not do so if it might make their brother stumble.
  - That is actually Paul’s emphasis in this passage.
  - He mentions “stumbling” language twice in verses 20b–21.
  - We have considered this before, but Paul is emphatic about it here.
  - No matter the freedom, we must surrender using it if it will make our brother or sister sin.

**d) Fourth, if necessary, be content with private freedom (22–23).**

So, already we have learned 1) not to give reason for criticism in how we use our gifts, 2) that we must seek peace and mutual edification, and 3) that we must not destroy the work of God with our freedoms. Now, we move to a final command.

Actually, verses 22–23, contain the command and a following explanation about “faith” (*show the word “faith” in verses 22 and 23*).

Let’s look first at the command in verse 22. **Read verse 22.**

- **Command (22a)** – <sup>22</sup> *The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.*

This final command sounds strange! What could Paul possibly mean when he says that we are to keep our faith to ourselves?

- Well, Paul is not telling us to be closet Christians who tell no one about our faith.
- Instead, he is specifically addressing the freedom that Christians have to eat and drink.
- The silence that he requires here involves failing to publicly practice or brag about our freedom.
- I like how Schreiner says it:
  - “[Christians] are free to maintain the convictions of their faith in the privacy of their home or with other believers of like convictions.”<sup>291</sup>

So, Paul does not want us to arrogantly parade our freedoms if some of our brothers might struggle with it. The command then has the effect of saying that, if necessary, enjoy your freedoms in private. This is not hypocrisy; it is love.

- **Explanations (22b–23)** – *Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.* <sup>23</sup> *But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

That is when Paul gives two final points of explanation that are encouragements for stronger believers to continue.

- He first explains the blessedness of the brother who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for how he has behaved.
  - It is like the joy of acing a test—getting a 100%. We have no regrets. We made it through the test well.
  - It is an even greater joy to pass through life situations without any blame—without any sin.
- Next, in verse 23, Paul explains why refusing to force weaker brothers to share in our freedom is important.
  - If some Roman believer does not think he has the freedom to eat meat and goes against his conscience, then it is wrong for him—it is sin.
  - That is, if he doubts, then he should not.
    - Do you remember my mother’s slogan that I told you about last week?
    - When I was growing up, my mother would say, “Brent, if you doubt, do not.”
    - It appears that her slogan is well-rooted in Scripture!

But again, this point of explanation is actually something the strong must realize.

- Paul wants the strong to understand this about the weak.
- Now, ultimately, it should be a horrific thought for us to be guilty of leading another person into sin—to lead a spouse or child by violating her or their conscience.

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<sup>291</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 728.

- You see, sin is so deceitful and damning.
- We should never think that it is no big deal—it is just one sin for him or her.
- Imagine a husband or father who leads his family to watch entertainment that is sinful or suggestive.
  - His wife or children say that the movie is wrong and making them feel guilty—the language or sensuality is too much, but the father injects, “It is no big deal!”
- Or imagine a mature believer putting pressure on a weaker believer at a get-together to participate in something that he feels is wrong.
  - No, if your brother is questioning it or expressing his hesitancy, you must pull back because God’s kingdom is not about these physical things.
  - God’s kingdom involves “right relationships,” “peace” and “joy” that the Spirit produces in God’s children.

As we close, let’s consider something about ourselves and this text.

- We live in a world that is all about personal and bodily autonomy—“My body; my choice.”
  - The culture declares that no one can tell you what to do with your freedom.
- Today, however, we have considered Scripture—what God’s Word says about your Christian freedom.
  - We have learned that we are free to use our freedom as Christ did by seeking right relationships, harmony, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, let Kingdom values guide your choices and commitments this week!

## 2. Final call for Christian unity (15:1–13)

Having established important principles and responsibilities for Christian brothers and sisters in liberty issues, Paul closes out the section with a final declaration (v. 1) and twin final appeals (vv. 2–13). Now, Romans 15:1–13 is an important passage. Our very own, Dr. Daniel, calls this section the “summit of the entire letter.”<sup>292</sup> One might argue that Paul closes out not only this section about Christian liberty, but the whole body of the letter with this important passage.

Now, within this final call to Christian unity, Paul calls the church to be unified like one majestic voice singing praise to God.

- This summer, you gave a precious gift to me and my family—I had a two-month sabbatical.
- Now, you might not realize it, but the first Lord’s Day that we were on rest, I went with my family to worship at a church in Washington D.C.

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<sup>292</sup> Davey, *Romans*, no page #.

- So, I went to this church a bit weary and was so encouraged by the church family there.
  - We worshipped in this old auditorium (*nothing spectacular, old carpeting*) but was built in a unique way.
  - It was two stories with a balcony and had two halves partially turned toward one another.
  - The preacher would come to the pulpit and in your periphery was the other half of the congregation.
  - So, you were looking at one another.
- The best part of all this, however, was the congregational singing!
  - I love hearing believers sing to one another.
  - That is one of my favorite things about our gatherings!
- But, on this Sunday, I wearily gathered with this congregation of believers in Washington D.C., and I was strengthened by hearing the congregation sing!
  - It was awesome.
  - It was about 1,000 people in 1,000 chairs, each with strong backs belting out praise to Jesus!
  - At one point in the service, I quit singing for a moment and closed my eyes and listened and it sounded like one majestic voice resonating out praise to God.
- Have you ever had an experience like that before?

In this passage, today, Paul will use this analogy to pray that God enables believers to be so harmonious that they with one voice glorify God. So, it is my goal, that God uses this passage to help us make sweet music together as one voice—in unity and in praise to God.

**a. Final declaration (1) – <sup>1</sup> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

Let's begin by looking at Paul's final declaration in verse 1. **Read it.**

In this verse, Paul states two obligations that the strong have to the weak, one positive and the other negative. We will consider those obligations in a moment.

First, however, let's get the language that Paul uses for the obligation.

- The words “have an obligation” come from the verb that Paul used in Rom 13:8 about believers “owing” each other love.
  - If you remember that verse, Paul talked about love like currency that we always owe one another.
  - Here Paul combines the word “owe” with the word for “bear.”
    - Now, this does not mean that we owe it to each other to tolerate each other.
    - No, it is deeper than that.
    - The strong owe it to their brothers to bear their burden.

- The word for “bear with” is used sometimes literally of carrying something (*sandals in Matt 3:11; water jug in Mark 14:13*), and sometimes metaphorically in the NT (*bearing our diseases in Matt 8:17*).<sup>293</sup>
  - In our passage, Paul uses it metaphorically to portray that believers must carry or pick up their weak brothers and sisters.
  - Paul says this clearly in another place as well.
    - In Gal 6:1–2, Paul writes, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Now, Paul describes this obligation to our believers both positively and negatively.

- The positive obligation is ... to carry “the weaknesses of the powerless.”
  - That is my preferred translation of the next phrase.
  - The ESV says, “the failings of the weak,” but better and more literally this could be translated “the weaknesses of the powerless.”
  - Here the weaker brother is described as one lacking strength, one without power.
    - In Greek it is the word for power and then the negation—“no power.”
  - And these powerless ones are those burdened down with “weakness.”
    - In context, they do not feel freedom to eat meat, and they feel compelled to celebrate every Jewish ceremony.
  - So, the strong believers must carry the burdens of the weak.
- The negative obligation follows. They must also ... not “please” themselves.
  - They must not use their Christian liberty in selfish ways to suit their own pleasure.<sup>294</sup>
  - They must not serve themselves in such matters—in such choices.

## b. Twin final appeals (2–13)

That is Paul’s final declaration about our obligation. This leads Paul to offer twin final appeals. These are not two separate discussions; they are the same discussion--twice! In our family, we like twins!

Here, we have twin paragraphs that are actually quite similar. They both have the following four components:

- ***Opening Commands (vv. 2, 7)***

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<sup>293</sup> Thielman points this out in his commentary. Thielman, *Romans*, 656.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. Abernathy, *Exegetical Summary of Romans 9–16*, 308.

- **Commands Grounded in Example (vv. 3a, 8–9a)**  
v. 3a “For Christ...” vv. 8-9a “For I tell you that Christ...”
- **Scriptural Warrants (vv. 3b–4, 9b–12)**  
v. 3b “But it is written” v. 9b “As it is written”
- **Prayer Wishes (vv. 5–6, 13)**  
v. 5 “May the God” v. 13 “May the God”

Today, we will consider the first.

## 1) “Please your neighbor for his good” (2–6).

### a) A command regarding our brothers (2–4)

- **The command itself (2)** – <sup>2</sup> *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

This appeal starts with the command itself in verse 2. **Read it.**

Paul says, “He must please his neighbor.”

- With this command, Paul states in no uncertain terms what he’s just said negatively.
- Our foundational commitments must include pleasing not ourselves but “our neighbor.”
- Now, we might wonder why Paul uses the word “neighbor” here instead of “brother.”
  - Well, the word for “neighbor” when used of other objects is normally translated “near.”
  - Paul wants us to please those near us or the ones close by.
  - In other words, if “brother and sister” does not capture our nearness, this word makes it explicit!
- Each of us must please those who Jesus has brought near us in the church!

The sort of pleasing that Paul imagines is not just everything our weaker brother might desire of us.

- There can be a pleasing of others that is not good!
  - In Gal 1:10, Paul writes, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”
  - Paul realized that there is a sinful kind of pleasing others that simply tries to appease them.
- But, in our passage, Paul specifically says that the pleasing leads to the good of our brothers, especially their edification.
  - That is, we must strive to build up our brothers and sisters in these matters.

- In another liberty text, Paul describes his own approach with Jewish people and Gentiles, with strong and with weak.
  - He writes, “Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33).
  - Paul accommodated and served everyone he could so they could be saved.
- So, here, Paul wants each of us to serve or accommodate each other in their weaknesses for their good.
- **Grounds for the command (3–4)**

That is when Paul offers two grounds for this command. We can pick this up when we look at the next word at the beginning of verse 3—“for.” This gives us a ground or a reason for not pleasing ourselves but our neighbor.

- **First, we should please our neighbor because Jesus did (3a).** <sup>3</sup> *For Christ did not please himself.*

The first ground regards Jesus. ***Look with me at the very beginning of verse 3.***

It is good for us to answer the question: “In what sense did Jesus not please himself in his life?”

- Well, the whole nature of his ministry—his whole career—was about not pleasing himself.
  - It started with his willingness to become a human being—he did not count equality with God to be a thing he should grasp, but he humbled himself by taking on the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men, in human form.
  - Perhaps, the clearest demonstration of this, however, was his crucifixion.
- Eerdman explains it well: “[he] endured the greatest abuse and unkindness from the most bigoted and unreasonable men.”<sup>295</sup>
  - But even more powerful than that is the testimony of Scriptures.
    - Brothers and sisters, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, that that we by his poverty might become rich” (*cf.* 2 Cor 8:9).
    - “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:21).

No doubt, the supreme example of one who forsook his own pleasures to fulfill and advance the mission of God is Jesus.

- **Second, we should please our neighbor because the Scriptures call for it (3b–4).** *But as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*<sup>4</sup> *For*

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<sup>295</sup> Eerdman, *Reading Romans*, 148.

*whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

After saying this outright, Paul goes to scripture to prove that Jesus did not please himself. Consequently, the OT Scriptures form a second ground for obedience. **Let's notice how he does this in verses 3b–4.**

In this passage, Paul quotes “one of the most powerful cries of personal distress in the Psalter”—Psalm 69.<sup>296</sup>

- In the original Psalm, David cries out against his enemies.
  - They have 1) heaped insults on him, 2) attempted to feed him poison, and 3) offered him only sour vinegar to drink.
  - More importantly for our purposes, however, David suggests that his enemies have done this to him because of his commitment to and love for God.
  - That is how this quote can be understood in its original context—“The reproaches of those who reproached “you” (“God”) have fallen on “me” (“David”).
    - A key to this quote is to consider who the original speaker was and who he was addressing.
    - In the Psalm, it is David addressing God.
- Paul then applies that statement in the Psalms to Jesus, so Jesus could say, “The reproaches of those who reproached “you” (“God”) have fallen on “me” (“Jesus”).
  - John Stott describes how Jesus bore the reproaches of his father: “Christ so completely identified himself with the name, will, cause, and glory of the Father that insults intended to God fell upon him.”<sup>297</sup>

But then Paul explains that these things were written to instruct us!

- That is, this passage in the Psalter tells us not only how David or Jesus lived, but how “we” (“*stronger believers*”) must live as well.
- You see, the Christian life calls us to “bear the reproach of Jesus” by pleasing our Christian brothers and sisters more than ourselves!
  - For them this meant avoiding meat in some settings, for us, perhaps, this means that we love the one who offended us with their words or actions more than our own personal comfort.
    - This does not mean that we endure their abuse; no, we appeal to church or governmental leaders to protect us in such cases.

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<sup>296</sup> Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 838.

<sup>297</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 370.

- But in other situations, men and women, this is Paul's call to us—not to please ourselves, but those brought near to us in the church for their good.

**b) A prayer regarding our harmony (5–6) – <sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The paragraph is not finished!

But then Paul closes the paragraph with a prayer for their harmony in the body of Christ.  
***Let's consider that prayer in verses 5–6.***

Now, let me say a few things about this part of the passage.

- First, this is one of five prayers that Paul uses to conclude sections in the last part of Romans (15:5–6, 13, 33; 16:20, 25–27).
  - Three of these prayers are found in Romans 15 and they all follow the same form (i.e., “may the God of ...”).
  - So, when you see “May the God of...,” know that Paul is issuing a closing prayer to God for the Romans to be what he calls them to be in the passage.
- Second, in this prayer wish, Paul asks *God* to do this!
  - He says, “May God ... grant you.”
  - Paul knows ultimately that this is a gift.
  - It is not something that we can do for ourselves!
- Finally, Paul asks God to produce a harmony or unity that empowers believers to glorify God as if they were one voice singing together.
  - The words “with one voice” speak of a group of people functioning like one.
    - In Acts, for instance, this word is used to describe the way that a crowd acted together as one.
    - So, it could be translated simply “with one mind” or “with one accord.”
  - Instead, I do like the translation “with one voice” because in the very next passage, Paul is going to quote songs from the OT—songs from Moses, and David, and Isaiah.
    - He will also add a Hallel song to that from the Psalms.
    - So, Paul has singing on his mind and what a beautiful picture this is!
    - Paul prays for a church to be in such unity with one another that they are like one majestic voice, singing praise to the glory of God.
  - You see, this is the ultimate reason we exist.
    - Our church's mission statement is “displaying God's glory by making disciples through the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

- We are here individually and corporately to display God’s glory—to proclaim His supremacy—to make Him known!
  - That is chief.
  - That is ultimate.

As we close, might I ask you: What would have happened if some in that church in Washington D.C. chose not to sing?

- What if some refused to sing—pockets here and there, people in one section of the balcony, a whole section on the front left side?
- Well, the effect would be diminished!

This is what happens when we refuse to serve and please those nearby—in our church.

- Our song of praise to the Supreme One is softened so that people can hardly see in us that our God is glorious!

May God enable us to make sweet music together. May He give us sweet unity that projects the glory of our great God! May the most prominent thing about us be the glorious harmonious praise of our great God!

## 2) “Welcome one another” (7–13).

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 15. This morning, we will consider the summit or climax of Paul’s argument to the Roman believers about how they should use their liberty.

- At the beginning of this chapter, Paul concludes his exhortations about liberty with twin paragraphs.
- Each paragraph contains one command, grounds for following the commands (*i.e.*, *Jesus & Scripture*), and then prayer.

Last week, we considered Paul’s foundational command “not to please ourselves, but to please our neighbor—our near ones.” We considered that Paul would have us “live in such harmony with one another that we may with ‘one voice’ glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul uses the analogy of powerful, majestic singing to call us to sing together, metaphorically sing together in unity as “one voice” to praise God.

- Did you determine to do that this week?
- Maybe you decided not to please yourself in some situation or disagreement with a brother or sister here last week, have you followed through on that this week?

This week, we consider the second concluding paragraph—verses 7–13. Specifically, we will consider what it means and then how it works or moves.

As I see it, however, we have a significant opportunity as a church in the days and sermons ahead.

- From this point on in Romans 15, Paul clearly lays out his vision for ministry and for the churches of Rome.
- As we consider what he says here, let’s notice how his argument moves!

- We can learn from what someone says, but also how.
  - Let's consider what Paul's goals and strategies are here.
- Let's learn how his argument moves, so we can learn how a church should move!
- May Paul's vision inform our vision!

So, let's consider what all this means—the pieces—and then let's ask God to help us put the pieces together at CBC so we can move with clarity and precision for the glory of God in Virginia Beach.

#### a) A command regarding our brothers (7–12)

So, let's look at verses 7–13.

- **The command itself (7)** – <sup>7</sup> *Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

Now, Paul starts with an opening command in verse 7. **Let's read that.**

Now, we are going to look at this command in all its parts, paying special attention to the objects identified in the command—there are three in this little command, in this one verse.

Paul begins by considering “us”—the church, but then he'll move on. We will trace that movement as we go along.

But the command starts with us to “welcome one another.” Paul stresses this need by repeating the verb “welcome” (προσλαμβάνω) twice in this verse.

- This word is used of the sense “to welcome or receive others warmly.”
- It is used this way in only a few places in the NT.
  - For instance, in Acts 28:2 the native people of Malta showed unusual kindness to those with Paul who were shipwrecked. They “took in” those shipwrecked, making a fire to keep them warm—treated them as family.
  - Is this how you would treat even those in the church that you have had disagreements with?
  - Now, interestingly, Paul begins this large section by using the word “welcome” twice (14:1; 3). Consequently, he frames this whole section with this important requirement. We must welcome or receive one another warmly.

So, Paul's opening command to the believers of Rome is for them to receive each other warmly. Both kinds of brothers—the weak and the strong—were to receive or accept one another. And they were to do this in a specific manner. They must do it as Jesus received them for God's glory. That is how Paul's argument moves in verse 7.

- Now, the place where welcoming others was probably most evident in their culture was the common meal or communal meals. We can read about these in a few places in the NT.

- Galatians, for instance, pictures a group of Jewish believers who removed themselves from a meal with Gentile believers over concerns related to cleanness.
  - **Read Gal 2:11–16.**
  - Even though Peter and Barnabas were led astray in Antioch, Paul confronts them because there was no scriptural basis for this—all food is now clean.
  - And justification comes entirely through faith!
    - Peter and Barnabas and the Jews in Antioch were bad examples of rejecting people at the table.
    - Paul, however, was a good example of accepting others at a communal meal.
- But there is an even better example. We can read about him in Mark’s gospel.
  - **Read Mark 2:15–17.**
  - The scribes and Pharisees accused and rejected Christ for eating with tax-collectors and sinners.
  - But Christ was in the practice of accepting and welcoming sinners so that he might minister the gospel to them.
  - Unfortunately, however, “Christ’s earthly actions are not quite real to us” in the church.<sup>298</sup>
    - His actions are not vivid to us.
    - They are words on a page, not actions that guide and control us!
- When Jesus includes your brother, you must welcome him too. Do you recognize that your brother or sister who has offended you will sit with Jesus in the greatly heavenly banquet—the marriage supper of the Lamb?

Paul demands that each of us receive each other even if we see some matters differently!

But notice as well that Paul states the reason or purpose for which we must welcome one another—“for the glory of God.” Here Paul moves from us—with one another—to Christ—he lifts us up in him—to the greatest reality in the entire universe—the glory of God. When we decide to warmly receive and prefer our brothers and sisters, we are indeed glorifying God.

- **Grounds for the command (8–12)**

Next, Paul gives reasons (*grounds*) why he expects the Romans believers to receive each other. His reasons or grounds are two-fold.

- **First, we should receive each other because Jesus did (8–9a).**<sup>8</sup> *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to*

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<sup>298</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans*, 282.

*confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,<sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

In verses 8 and 9, Paul gives us a good reason to welcome other brothers and sisters, regardless of differences in matters of liberty. He had already hinted at this in verse 7, but here he makes it explicit.

We must receive them because Christ had international goals in his sacrificial life and death! In other words, Christ became a servant to minister to both Jew and Gentile. You can see that in the parallel purposes that Paul articulates in the middle of verse 8 and the beginning of verse 9 (“*in order to*”; “*in order that*”). The mission of Jesus was for both Jew and Gentile.

Now, it is also likely that these purposes are sequential, revealing Christ’s ultimate concern to make a way for “Gentiles” to glorify God, for all the nations to glorify God!

- Jesus’s work was for the Jewish patriarchs—the Fathers (*Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.*) and for the Gentiles—so that they might glorify God.

So, Christ had international goals in his ministry—he died for our Jewish and Gentile brothers and sisters! These Jewish and Gentile believers must receive each other—Jesus did! Now, let’s move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> command. You might think that the OT had much positive to say about the Gentiles! But it does, and Paul appeals to that here!

- **Second, we should receive each other because the Scriptures foretold it (9b–12).** *As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing your name.”<sup>10</sup> And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”<sup>11</sup> And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.”<sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope.”*

Jesus’s ministry for the Gentiles was to fulfill several statements about them in the OT. The word “Gentiles” is mentioned five times here showing that God is concerned for the Gentiles Paul quotes four passages from the OT.

Now, we can only overview these four citations and make a few observations this morning. Let me point out four things!

- First, each of these four citations contains Gentiles praising the Lord. In other words, the word “Gentiles” is a “hook word” that occurs in each of the citations.
- Second, these passages come from every section of the Scriptures, including the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets.
  - That is, Paul creates a catena of scriptural excerpts, summoning Torah (Deut 32:43), Prophets (Isa 11:1), and the Psalms (Psa 17:50 LXX; Psa 116:1 LXX) to bring his argument to a close.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 311.

- This practice is rabbinic in nature (*pearl stringing*) as the rabbis would sometimes quote from every section of the Hebrew Scripture to offer conclusive evidence for their views.
  - As a formerly trained rabbi, Paul proves his point indisputably by arguing that all Scripture agrees with him!
  - Like the old evangelist who would quote Scripture after Scripture.
  - If you argue with me, you argue with God!
- Third, notice that the first and last quotations give declarations regarding the Gentiles and the middle two quotations contain imperatives or OT commands given to the Gentile nations to praise the Lord alongside the Jews.
- In my opinion, it appears that the stress is placed on the indicatives.
  - Paul starts and ends with simple statements about the Gentiles praising God to show that the OT predicted a time when Gentiles would be empowered to worship God.
  - That time is now!
  - Paul understands that the root of Jesse has come—the one who arose (*incarnation or resurrection*) to rule the Gentiles!
  - Paul sees that it is “in Jesus” that the Gentiles now hope!
  - Jewish believers must welcome Gentile believers in Jesus as full-fledged worshippers of God.
  - Jesus has provided the way for everyone to be included!
- Finally, notice again the movement in this greater text.
- Paul already moved from us to Christ to God’s glory in verse 7, now he moves to the Gentiles—the nations.
  - And that is where he will focus in the final part of Romans 15 as well.
    - In the very next part of chapter 15 (vv. 14–21), Paul mentions the “Gentiles” three times. **Read verses 14–21.** So, Paul is a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.
    - Further, after Paul closes that paragraph, in the following paragraph (15:22–29) Paul zeroes in on a new, unreached pocket of Gentiles he wants to reach—those in Spain (vv. 24, 27). **Read verses 22–29.** Paul not only wants to reach Spain, he desires for the unified, Roman believers to help him through prayer and support.
    - This is perhaps one of the main reasons why Paul wrote Romans! Some commentators, like Robert Jewett, suggest that this might even be the primary purpose for the whole letter.<sup>300</sup>
    - Regardless, however, Paul desires to follow “the same pattern” that he established in his first missionary journeys, where he would use Antioch as his mission base and launch out to unexplored regions for the gospel. Paul longs for an abounding church of Rome to be his “Antioch of the West.”
    - They must unify, so they can evangelize with him!

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<sup>300</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 892.

- And, men and women, this is important for us to see as a church as well. Consider what God can do with our church if we unify in warm welcome with one another and share our resources for God's glory in the nations.
  - Will God move or work in and through us to reach the lost?
  - According to *Mission Quest*, there remains 7,282 unreached people groups in the world. Unreached people groups are those where less than 2% of the population claims to be believers in Jesus Christ.
  - So, 7,282 people groups are unreached, that involves more than 3.4 billion people.
  - Now, the *Joshua Project* famously estimated a few years ago that approximately 180 of those people groups are "untargeted." That is, no Christian church yet has targeted and strategized to reach them.
  - Imagine what God can do through Colonial Baptist Church with our seminary.
    - What can God do through us to reach one of those untargeted people groups?
    - What can God do through us to reach ten of those untargeted people groups?
    - What can God do through us to reach a hundred of those untargeted people groups?
  - Imagine God multiplying our efforts as we send our own people around the world with the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ.
    - Listen, this is not the only baptismal pool where our church can enjoy baptisms!
    - Imagine reports from rivers and lakes and oceans around the world where people go out to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us!
  - May the movement of this text move us!
  - May Paul's vision inform our vision!

Well, it all starts here with this first command—a repeated command, "welcome one another." Jesus welcomed Gentile believers into God's family and the OT spoke of a time when it would happen. So, we must get with the program and receive brothers from different backgrounds who hold different positions on liberty issues!

**b) A prayer regarding our hope (13)** – <sup>13</sup> *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

But there is more to learn! Let's also consider Paul's pastoral prayer. **Read verse 13.**

Paul wants the Roman church also to "abound in hope." More specifically, Paul prays that the God of hope would fill them with all joy and peace in believing so that through the Holy Spirit they would abound in hope.

To make this simple, Paul prays for “abundance” in the Roman church. Now, do not get me wrong, he has certain types of abundance that he desires (*not financial, physical resources, numbers*). He longs that they abound or be filled with certain things.

- First, he prays that they would be filled with all joy.
  - He wants them to be “an exuberantly joyous assembly!”
  - He longs for God to bring them true and abounding joy!
- He also wants them to be filled with peace.
  - He prays that they would not experience disharmony and tension, but to know the deep well-being that God has established for them.
- He wants them to be filled with faith.
  - It says, “in believing.”
  - Faith is the “quality of trusting God or Christ.”
- Finally, and ultimately, Paul prays for the Holy Spirit to make them abound in hope! He wants their corporate hope in Christ to be overflowing!

So, we have considered how Paul’s argument moves in Romans 15. He goes from us to Christ to God’s glory to the nations. It all starts, however, with a joyful, peaceful, abounding, church, where believers “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us.”

#### **IV. The Missiological Purpose: You must understand and be conformed to the gospel so you can participate together in Paul’s vision to reach the West with it (15:14–33)**

In the book of Romans, we have already considered Paul’s theological (1:16-11:36) and pastoral (12:1-15:13) reasons for the book.

- Paul writes so that the Roman believers understand the gospel and obey the gospel, but in the second half of Romans 15, we come to his final purpose for writing.
- Many see this next section—verses 15–33—as an epilogue or conclusion to the letter, but I see it still as part of the body of the letter where Paul uncovers his missiological purpose for writing Romans.
- An unreached people on Paul’s heart forming one of the reasons why Paul wrote Romans.

***Let’s read through this final part of chapter 15 and listen for Paul’s missiological reason.***

Verses 15–33 involve reasons—1) reasons to write (15:14–16), 2) reasons for absence (15:17–22), and 3) reasons for a visit to Rome (15:23–33).

- Verse 22 makes this obvious!
- ***Read it.***
- Now, if you mark in your Bible, you could put the word “letter” next to verses 14–16, the word “absence” next to verses 17–22, and “visit” by verses 23–33.

In other words, Paul says this is 1) why I wrote, 2) why I have never visited, and 3) why I am coming soon. Now, when someone distills why they are doing something, it is normally very valuable information. Clearly stated reason is valuable. Especially if you hear from someone important! Imagine hearing an expert musician or

athlete talk about why they hold their instrument or their ball the way they do! How about hearing from the greatest missionary of all-time? This is the most significant text in all his writings about methods and motives in mission.

This morning, we will look at verses 14–22 and consider both 1) the reason for the letter and 2) the reason for his absence or refusal to go to Rome.

#### **A. Reason to Write: “Why I wrote” (14–16).**

Let’s begin with his reason to write in verses 14–16.

##### **1. Emphatic confidence in the Romans (14) – <sup>14</sup> I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.**

Paul begins here by demonstrating emphatic confidence. I call it emphatic because Paul himself is convinced of something about “you yourselves.” By saying “I myself” and “you yourselves” Paul slows the reader down to draw attention to his sincere, personal perspective on the Roman believers.

So, Paul is emphatically confident in the Roman believers. More specifically, he is confident that three things are true of them.

- They ... “are full of goodness” (μεστοί ἐστε ἀγαθωσύνης).
  - Now, let me point out a few things here.
    - First, the word “full” (μεστοί) is not a common Pauline word.
      - As a matter of fact, Paul only uses it twice in Romans.
      - The last time he used the word was in Rom 1:29 and there he uses it with the same word “filled” that he also uses in the next statement that he makes about the Romans here.
      - In that passage, Paul describes the utter depravity of human beings who replace God and worship and serve themselves: “They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness” and so on.
      - And Paul makes that point over the course of several chapters so that at the end of a long argument he can say that there is “none righteous, no not one.”
      - We are sinners through and through! Our hearts are full of these kinds of things!
    - But now, Paul says that the Roman believers were full of something very different - “goodness” (ἀγαθωσύνης). Well, what is goodness?
      - Goodness is that which God declares “good” or “upright.”
      - Goodness includes honesty, integrity, kindness, love.
      - This involves “moral” goodness and our commitment to it as well as “relational” goodness—how we treat others.
      - So, Paul is utterly convinced that the Romans are full of these things!
    - But how could this be true? Isn’t Paul normally “pessimistic” about sinful, human beings? Well, normally, yes.
    - So, how could people who were full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and maliciousness now be full of goodness?

- Well, he does not tell us explicitly here!
  - His answer, however, must involve conversion!
  - It must involve the “imputed righteousness” of Jesus.
- Because Jesus’s goodness is transferred to us, Paul can now say that there are some people who are “full” of these things!
  - What a thing to say!
  - What a thing to have—“in Christ Jesus”!
- But Paul continues by saying that they ... are “filled with all knowledge” (πεπληρωμένοι πάσης γνώσεως). What does he mean by this? Does he mean that the Roman believers were especially intelligent like walking Encyclopedias—that they knew everything?
  - Well, no. He has a particular kind of knowledge in mind.
  - Earlier in Rom 2:19–20, Paul spoke of the self-confidence of the Jewish people that they were sure that they themselves had in the law the full embodiment of the knowledge and the truth.
  - The Jewish people felt that they had the fullest, clearest demonstration of God’s knowledge and truth in the law of Moses. That is, they had true knowledge—God’s knowledge! That was their presumption!
  - But Paul uses this expression in a positive way of the Roman believers. As an assembly, the churches of Rome were indeed filled with all knowledge—all genuine knowledge—all the knowledge of God.
- And that leads to one other area of confidence. Finally, they ... “are able to instruct one another” (δυνάμενοι ἀλλήλους νουθετεῖν). That is, they are able or competent to counsel one another. It was this text that motivated Jay Adams to write the famous counseling book—*Competent to Counsel*—where he made the case that believers who know the Word are able to counsel others.
  - Now, these phrases might work together in a result sort of way.
    - If you are “full of goodness” and “filled with all knowledge” then you are able to counsel one another.
  - Paul was emphatically confident that normal Roman believers were able to admonish and correct one another.
    - Now, this is an important point to make in an age that calls for specialization and professionalism.
    - There is definitely some value in specialization and professional training and certifications (*especially if the advanced training rests on Scriptural principles!*), but here Paul says that the First Century Roman church was able to counsel one another. Could you imagine how some elite psychologists would evaluate the competency of ancient, illiterate Roman believers?
    - Listen! It would not look pretty!
    - Yet, Paul could say, “You are qualified to counsel.”
    - Now, I know there is some value in academic training and experience, but the idea of “professionalism” can also be a racket.
    - Who defines who the professionals are?

- Let me say it this way, “Just because I have received a doctorate or two, does not mean that you should trust me!”
  - It does not mean that I understand the Bible or truth better than others.
  - I have heard many people with degrees and certifications that I would actually warn you against!
- Our demand for certifications and professionals can sometimes betray confidence in the wrong object!
  - Brothers and sisters, if you find a believer who knows the Word *well*—a believer who is full of goodness and knowledge, then you have found someone competent to counsel!
  - I would rather have someone acquainted with Scripture, than Freud, Skinner, and Rodgers.
  - We do not need as many distant, out of town experts as we need Christians informed by the word that cuts, divides hearts.

That is Paul’s emphatic confidence about the Roman believers.

- It will not do to see Paul just saying some nice things about the Romans that he does not really mean!
- No.
- That would be deception.

Paul knew these things to be true of those in Rome who were in Jesus Christ.

**2. Overwhelming impulse to write (15–16) – <sup>15</sup> But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

To this, however, Paul adds his rationale for writing to them. Although he was confident about them, he had an overwhelming impulse to write to them. ***Let’s read about that impulse to write in verses 15 and 16.***

At the heart of these two verses is Paul’s explanation of why he wrote to the Romans.

- In Rom 12:3, Paul began a new section of Romans where he argued boldly for practical, Christian devotion.
- There he said that he ventured to “say” these things to the Romans on the basis of “the grace given to me.”
- Consequently, then, I believe that it is Paul’s point to describe Romans 12–15 as being written in boldness to call the church of Rome to service and love and submission and honor and unity.

Paul writes with such boldness because of God’s call on his life as a minister in priestly service to Gentiles. The purpose of all of this was that Paul would have an acceptable, holy, offering of Gentile converts for God.

So, although Paul is confident in the goodness and knowledge and ability of the Roman believers, he’s written boldly to them so that they would be acceptable, made holy by the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and Son to change lives.

**B. Reason for Absence: “Why I have never visited” (17–22).** <sup>17</sup> *In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.* <sup>18</sup> *For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed,* <sup>19</sup> *by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;* <sup>20</sup> *and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation,* <sup>21</sup> *but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”* <sup>22</sup> *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.*

But Paul’s not done uncovering his reasons. He wrote boldly for these purposes, but he also wants to uncover his reason for never visiting Rome. I call this the reason for his absence. It is found in verses 17–22.

Have you ever asked someone to visit you before only to have them refuse your invitation? “Hey, come down to VB and visit us sometime.” But then they never come!

- It can be a little unsettling.
  - Is there something about you that they really do not like?
  - Did you wonder why they said ‘no’?
- I heard some potentially exciting news this past week.
  - For the last eight years, I have occasionally invited a Christian preacher to come and minister to us.
  - He is a faithful and gifted minister, and I believe his gifts would be a blessing to us here.
  - So, I have asked him to come twice, but, on both occasions, I have received a “no” from his travel committee.
    - Now, I know that he is very busy, but I must admit that I have wondered why!
    - Is it something about us?
  - But, just this week, he informed me that he would like to come!
  - Now, do not get too excited, with as busy as he is, it might be ten years or something!

Now, imagine the Roman believers wondering—“Why? Why does he keep cancelling his visits? Why has he never visited us in Rome?”

One might wonder how this text fits with what he just gave us, but we have to remember that he is giving reasons in this passage. The first was his reason to write; the second is his reason for absence. Paul wants the Romans to know why he has not been able to visit the Roman believers in person (see verse 22).

Now, Paul’s reason is complex, and it unfolds through a conclusion, explanation, and clarification.

**1. A Conclusion (17) –** <sup>17</sup> *In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.*

The conclusion is verse 17. **Read it.**

Now, we can see that it is a conclusion by the word “then” or “therefore/so” in some other translations. Paul is saying, “Based on the things I just said about my priestly ministry to Gentiles for God, I conclude something.”

His conclusion is that it is “in Christ Jesus” that he has reason to boast of his work. You see, the words “in Christ Jesus” at the beginning of the verse are very important! Throughout the next several verses, many commentators struggle with Paul’s self-boasting. They, however, miss these important words. Paul’s conclusion is that he only has reason to boast “in Christ Jesus” and what Christ has done through him.

## 2. An Explanation (18–21)

Now, the reader might not pick up on the words “in Christ Jesus,” so Paul adds an explanation in verses 18–21 to make things more understandable. As a matter of fact, the little word at the beginning of most English versions of verse 18—because or for—is almost like Paul saying, “Let me explain.” Paul’s explanation, started with the “for” in verse 18, goes down through the end of verse 21.

### a. Paul’s accomplishments offer no reason to boast (18a). <sup>18</sup> *For I will not venture to speak of anything. . .*

At the beginning of verse 18, Paul says that there are some things that he will not even venture to say! With this expression, Paul is saying that his own accomplishments—things he could do in his own strength—offer no reason to boast. He will not even venture to speak of such things.

### b. Christ’s accomplishments through Paul are reason to boast (18b–21).

Instead, he will only talk about “what Christ has accomplished through” him. You see, Paul is not interested in self-boasting, only boasting that makes much of Christ. We can see that in other passages as well. *Remember Gal 6:14?* “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So, in our passage in Romans, Paul says that he will boast only in the things that Jesus has accomplished in him. Now, I want to look at this in the many ways that Paul uncovers in this brief passage.

#### 1) The fruit of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul (18b) – *except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience.*

He begins by giving us the fruit of Christ’s accomplishments in him in the middle of verse 18. **Look there.**

The fruit of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul was to bring many Gentiles to obedience. At the very beginning of the book, in Rom 1:5, Paul spoke of his own apostleship as being for “the obedience of faith among the nations.” So, far from being a throwaway phrase, this little phrase “to bring the Gentiles to obedience” reveals not only Paul’s target in his apostleship, but the fruit or end result of his apostleship that Christ worked through him.

#### 2) The means of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul (18c–19b) – *by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.*

That is the fruit of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul. That leads us next to the “means” of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul. You might wonder how Jesus did this through Paul and that is what Paul next answers. Jesus used three means to reach the nations through Paul.

- **First, Jesus did this by “word and deed”** (λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ). The amazing fruit of the great missionary, Paul, started with simple things—“words and deeds.” Paul was willing to speak and act. The first thing Jesus used to reach the world through Paul was what he said and did.
- **Second, Jesus did this “by the power of signs and wonders”** (ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων). To this, Jesus added “the power of signs and wonders.”
  - These words are biblical words that speak of the way God sometimes worked miracles to affirm someone’s ministry.
  - Now, these two words are used in tandem often in the OT (LXX) to describe the powerful miracles that God performed through Moses at the Exodus.
  - Consider, for instance, some of the concluding words of the Pentateuch: “<sup>10</sup> *And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,* <sup>11</sup> *none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land*” (Deut 34:10–11a).
  - God produced miracles to confirm the message and ministry of Moses.
  - Paul says that the same thing happened in his own ministry to the Gentiles.
    - We learn in the book of Acts that Paul was able to temporarily blind a sorcerer (13:9–11), heal a chronically, crippled man (14:8–10), cast out demons (16:16–18), heal infirmities on Malta (28:8–9), and raise Eutychus back from the dead (20:9–10).
    - We see in other places that Paul performed many powerful signs and wonders in Iconium (Acts 14:3), Corinth (2 Cor 12:12), and Ephesus (Acts 19).
    - God’s blessing was so pronounced that on one occasion even his handkerchiefs were able to heal the sick!
  - No doubt, Jesus confirmed the witness of Paul with signs and wonders.
- **Third, Jesus did this “by the power of the Spirit of God”** (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος [θεοῦ]).

And that is because, as our text says, Jesus did this through Paul “by the power of the Spirit of God.” The powerful, third member of the Triune God proceeded from both the Father and the Son and produced these miraculous things. Paul does not hide that the fruit of his apostolic ministry was miraculous, produced through the means of the Spirit of God.

### 3) The result of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul (19c–21)

That leads us to the results of Christ’s ministry through Paul. You can see that Paul is talking about results in the middle of verse 19 when he says “so that.” So, verses 19c–21 are about results. Better yet, they are about “the” result of Christ’s accomplishments through Paul. That is, one key result is on his mind in these verses. It is one result said in three ways. Let me summarize each way he makes his point.

- a) **“I have fully preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum” (19c).** *So that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;*

First, in the final part of verse 19, Paul says, “I have fully preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum.” Now, the focus on Jerusalem makes a great deal of sense as the starting point of the gospel of Jesus. This is not only where Jesus died and rose again, this is the birth place of the first followers of Christ. As a matter of fact, in Acts 1:8, when Jesus ascends, he says that the earliest disciples will be his witnesses in Jerusalem and go from there to the ends of

the earth. Illyricum is far closer to the ends of the earth. Paul's missionary travels carried him through Jerusalem, Samaria, Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, and evidently went as far West as Illyricum. Illyricum is west and north of modern day, Greece, in what we now call Albania. This province is just 50 miles across the Adriatic from the boot of Italy.

Now, Paul says that he "fulfilled" the ministry of the gospel in this large area. In what sense could Paul say that, however? Of course, he does not mean that every single person was converted in those areas. Instead, in the next verse he speaks of laying foundations, so his point here probably involves his commitment to plant churches of new believers in the large population centers in those unreached, untargeted areas. That is what Christ did through Paul!

- b) **"I preach where Jesus was not named" (20).** <sup>20</sup> *and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.*

Now, another way of speaking of this same result is found in verse 20. **Read it.**

The way this verse relates to what Paul has already said in verse 19 is a bit difficult. It seems to me, however, that Paul is continuing to describe the same thing. The first part of verse 20 might better be translated "that is" or "namely." In other words, Paul continues to talk about the result of Christ's work through him. Some important new information is given when Paul reveals that this continues to be his ministry strategy.

You could say Paul preached all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, but you could also say that he preached where Jesus was not named.

- It is here where we learn more about Paul's missionary strategies.
- Jesus died and rose again for sins. The only way to be saved because all have sinned.
- Paul preached the gospel in these areas to fill out a huge void.
- He was aware of believers in Rome and so Paul works to establish churches all throughout the area between Jerusalem and Rome.
- Paul was ambitious to preach the gospel to people who had never heard the name Jesus before.

In our church staff meetings, we have begun praying for unreached, untargeted people. This past Monday, we prayed for the Fulani people. They are 42 million people in Niger, Senegal, Ghana, and northern Cameroon. They are unreached—less than 1% of population claim Jesus. No doubt some have never heard Jesus's name in their own language. This is a large void. We need some with a pioneering spirit to go!

Would you pray with us about reaching them? Would you make it your ambition to reach this great void—this dark area where no one knows Jesus's name? Paul did not have small ambitions with his life; no, he was determined to make a dent in unreached, untargeted areas.

- c) **"Unbelievers there now see and understand" (21).** <sup>21</sup> *but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."*

But there is one more way to speak of what Christ did through Paul. It is found in verse 21. **Let's read that.**

Through Paul's evangelistic ministry, Christ fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in Isa 52:18. This passage concerns the Servant Song of Isaiah. This citation should not surprise us because Paul's already applied this section to his own ministry in Romans 10 when he asks how people can hear without someone proclaiming and then talks about "how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel."

In this passage, we learn that Paul was not only driven by the thought that some people had never heard or been told about Jesus, but that Christ produced this kind of fruit through Paul. Unseeing, unhearing, unbelievers became believers through Paul's ministry.

Paul will boast about what Jesus did to bring people like this to himself through Paul's ministry.

**3. A Clarification (22) – <sup>22</sup> *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.***

So, all of this—Paul's conclusion and explanation—forms the reason why Paul has never ministered in or visited Rome. Paul makes this clear through a clarification in verse 22. **Read it.**

The reason why Paul had been hindered so many times from coming to Rome is what Jesus was doing through him to reach the lost in the great unknown.

- The words "I have so often been hindered" are a divine passive.
- That is, God prevented Paul from going to Rome.
- So many people in this vast empire had never heard the name of Jesus, so Paul simply had no freedom to go to Rome to see them.
- There are a lot of places you could go—the world is before you!
- Will you not consider going where the gospel isn't?  
That was the reason why Paul wrote Romans AND why he'd never been to Rome.  
Make it be the reason why you do what you do!

**C. Reason for Visit: "Why I am coming soon" (23–33).**

In the second half of Romans 15, Paul sheds significant light on the reasons that he has in ministry—his 1) reason to write, 2) reason for absence, and 3) reason for his upcoming visit.

- Looking in depth at this passage, is like asking a Cy Young pitcher how he holds the baseball or a master concert violinist how he holds the bow or Michael Jordan and how he shot the ball.
  - If you had such an opportunity, you would pay close attention to their explanations.
  - How they do things?
  - If he or she was also an excellent teacher of their craft, he or she might also explain reasons—reasons why they do things.
- In this passage, we learn from the way the greatest pioneer-missionary-of-all-time does things.

So, we are taking two weeks to look inside Paul to see what he values and how he operates so that his heart and commitments get into us.

Last week, we saw some important things!

- First, we saw that Paul’s “ambition” was to preach the gospel where Jesus has never been named.
  - So, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (*from southern Palestine to Albania*), Paul focused singularly on mission in frontier areas for Jesus.
- We also learned that this ambition controlled Paul.
  - It kept him from doing other good things that he really wanted to do.
  - Paul really wanted to visit Rome and the Roman believers, but he had no freedom from Jesus to work that trip in.
  - Fulfilling this ambition took all of him.
- Finally, when you are faithful to a controlling ambition like this, we learned that you have amazing power.
  - Paul speaks of this twice in Romans 15 when he says that he only boasts about “what Christ did through me” (v. 18) and that it was “by the power of the Holy Spirit” (vv. 18b–19a) that he “no longer had any room to work in these regions” (v. 23).
  - You see, Paul tapped into God’s amazing power when he was faithful to the holy ambition that Christ had called him to.
  - We do not want to just pass the academic test.

Now, as we consider such things about Paul, we must ask ourselves some questions. We ask ourselves,

- “Do I live like this man did?”
- “Do I have these ambitions—these priorities—that drive me?”
- How does this affect me?”
  - A few years ago, several families in our church decided to move to Utah (*Kinseys, Varners, Tuckers, Campbells*).
  - Several young families uprooted themselves to go there.
  - They did not do this because they found better jobs there—jobs that paid more!
  - They went there because the largest part of the population in Salt Lake City does not know Jesus.
    - Does that surprise you?
    - I hope that this is your greatest ambition as well.
    - I hope that none of you move to a different location only because there is a job there that pays more.
    - Instead, I wish that we all would first consider: What God does want to accomplish with me? And where does He want me?

Today, we come to Rom 15:23–33 where we learn more about the reason why Paul planned to visit Rome, praying that God fills us—fills me—with the same heart as Paul.

## 1. Discussion of his travel plans (23–29)

Now, in this section, Paul begins with a frank discussion of his travel plans. His discussion begins with his general itinerary in verses 23–24 before getting more specific in verses 25–29 (*point out vuvì δὲ at beginning of vv. 23, 25*).

- a. **His general itinerary: Paul intends to go to Rome and Spain (23–24).** <sup>23</sup> *But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you,* <sup>24</sup> *I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

So, first, let's learn about his general plans in verses 23–24. **Look with me at those verses.**

It is now Paul's intention to go to Rome and then Spain. This is Paul's plan because two things are true.

- He “no longer has any room for work” in the vast regions of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Jesus used Paul to plant churches all throughout those regions.
- But this is also Paul's plan because he has “longed” for many years to make it to Rome.
  - The word “longed” is strong.
  - Paul does not use it very often, but when he does it describes an intense desire.
  - This was not just a passing fancy, Paul's really wanted to come to Rome.

Now, Paul makes two points abundantly clear in verse 24.

- **First, spending time in Rome will allow him to “enjoy their company.”**
  - This speaks of the mutual community that he hopes to enjoy with the Roman believers.
  - Spending time in the capital of the world will be enjoyable for Paul because of all the relationships that he will enjoy there in the Lord.
- **Second, Paul not only desires to enjoy their company, he also hopes they will “help him on his journey” to Spain.**
  - These words translate a verb that is also used in 3 John 6.
  - It describes outfitting someone for an expedition or a journey.
  - To be clear, this might mean giving them money, food, or supplies for their journey.<sup>301</sup>
    - Earlier in Romans 15, Paul describes how the OT spoke repeatedly of the nations or Gentiles worshipping and glorifying God.
    - Now, Paul reveals a new people group (the Spanish) among the nations that he intended to reach with the gospel.
    - The Roman empire had expanded west into Spain, organizing the Iberian Peninsula into three provinces.
    - Jewish settlements had also made it as far West as Spain, but Paul was aware that the Spanish people needed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
    - So, Paul wanted Rome to launch him in mission into Spain.
    - He wanted Rome to become the “Antioch of the West.”
    - Paul said earlier that God enabled him to reach this area.
    - So, Paul wanted to start in Rome and launch out in frontier missions to Spain too.

That is Paul's general itinerary that involves him going to Corinth, Rome, and Spain.

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<sup>301</sup> Cf. Robert Yarborough, *Romans*, 199.

**b. His specific itinerary: Paul's trip begins with a trip to Jerusalem (25–29).**

But, in verses 25–29, Paul reveals his specific itinerary. Paul actually has one other place to visit before he can make his way to Rome and Spain. In other words, Paul has three specific destinations on his mind—1) Jerusalem, 2) Rome, and 3) Spain. The total trip would take Paul over 3,000 miles by ship and land—quite an extensive trip even by modern standards.

So, although Paul had completed his pioneer mission in these areas, he still cannot come to Rome. What is the deal? Well, something rivaled the call to frontier missions in his heart. We will see what that is as he describes this fuller itinerary in verses 25–27.

Paul describes the first phase or leg of that journey in verses 25–27. **Let's look at it.**

**1) Phase 1 - From Corinth to Jerusalem (25–27) –** <sup>25</sup> *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.* <sup>26</sup> *For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.* <sup>27</sup> *For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought to be of service to them in material blessings.*

The first leg of Paul's journey to Rome involved him going about 800 miles in the opposite direction from Corinth to Jerusalem.

- A huge relief project had captured Paul's attention.
- Unfortunately, famines had riddled areas of Judea, bringing homelessness, hunger, and great poverty.
- Evidently, some people did not make it.
- So, Jewish widows, who lost their husbands, were moving back to Jerusalem to find support, but there were significant issues feeding the poor there.

The church in Jerusalem was being afflicted by this great need, so Paul was going to bring aid to the believers there. That is what he says in verse 26.

Then, in verses 26 and 27, he keeps giving explanations for why Gentile churches felt obligated to help (cf. "for... for... for").

- First, the churches of Macedonia (e.g. *Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea?*) and Achaia (e.g. *Corinth, Cenchreae?*) were "pleased" to give to these poor believers in Jerusalem.
  - In a parallel passage, Paul says that believers in Macedonia "begged earnestly for the favor" of giving (cf. *2 Cor 8:4*).
  - They wanted to partake in this because of the great need and because they knew that if they sowed much, they would reap much!
- Second, however, Paul explains that they were pleased to do it because they "owe" it to them.
  - Earlier in the book, Paul said that he personally felt an obligation to preach the gospel to the Greeks and the Barbarians (cf. *1:14*).
    - He said, "I am debtor."
    - He was "in debt."

- Jesus had given him a message for Gentiles and he had an obligation to deliver it.
- Here, it's Gentile believers who should feel indebted to the Jews.
- Finally, Paul explains the basis of this obligation with one of his common expressions.
  - In other places, Paul also explains that those who share their spiritual blessings with us are entitled to our material blessings.
  - He says this about Christian ministers of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 9: "If they have sown to you spiritual blessings, should you not share with them your material blessings?"
  - In this Romans passage, Paul speaks of the way that Gentile believers should be willing to help the Jewish people whose spiritual blessings have been extended to them.

Through Paul's description of his reasons to write, his absence, and his upcoming visits, two fundamental commitments of Paul's missionary theology come into focus—1) his "ambition" to preach where Jesus has never been named, and 2) his longing for the integration of all peoples into the church of Christ. Jesus died for all men—all ethnicities and people. We too must welcome every person—of every background—into the people of God—the church. The gospel breaks down all the barriers – so that all people can be integrated into the church of Christ! If any person or people believe the gospel, we welcome them joyfully as full members of the church of Christ.

- 2) Phase 2 - From Jerusalem to Rome and Spain (28–29) – <sup>28</sup> When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. <sup>29</sup> For I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.**

So, that is the first leg of Paul's journey—Corinth to Jerusalem. After that is completed, he plans to make the 1500-mile journey from Jerusalem to Rome and then another 700 miles to Spain. **Let's see what he says about phase two of his journey in verses 28 & 29.**

Paul has already described his missionary intentions in Rome and Spain, but here he declares his confidence that his time in Rome will involve the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Everyone will be blessed—both the Roman believers and Paul—in his layover in Rome.

## **2. Call for mutual prayer (30–33)**

Now, with these two projects on his mind—1) the gift for the Jerusalem church and 2) the missionary journey to Spain, Paul ends the chapter with a call for prayer.

### **a. An appeal for prayer (30–32)**

He first appeals for their prayers in verses 30–32 and then injects a prayer of his own to close out the chapter (v. 33).

- 1) The content of his prayer requests (30–31) – <sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, <sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.**

Look with me at what he asks the Romans to pray for. **Read verses 30–31.**

Paul is not just asking the Romans to send up a quick prayer for him when they hear this letter.

- No, he asks for them to engage in the rigor of intercessory prayers.
- He wants them to “strive together” with him in prayers.
- I love the words of William Carey when he wrote to his friend, Andrew Fuller.
- He said, “I will go into the pit, but you must hold the rope!

Carey spoke of the need for Fuller to pray and incite others to pray.

- Are you “holding the rope” for any missionaries?
- Are you praying?
- Since Paul believes so deeply in the power of prayer, he often solicits prayers from churches on his behalf.
- He does so in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Thessalonians (cf. 2 Cor 1:11; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1).

In Romans 15, there are two prayer requests for earnest prayer to be made (*“that” [2x] in verse 31*). These two prayer requests reveal the high social tension that plagued Jerusalem during this time. Paul was concerned about two particular groups of people.

- **First, Paul asks for prayer on behalf of the “unbelievers in Judea.”**

- More specifically, Paul was concerned that unbelieving Jews in Judea—the whole province around Jerusalem—would reject him.
  - Paul knew that many of the Jewish people rejected Jesus.
  - They wanted nothing to do with him or his group of followers.
  - No doubt, some fervent Jewish people felt that the whole thing was an attack on the Torah, and even more fundamentally, on the One true God—Yahweh.
  - So, Paul asks them to pray that he would be delivered from unbelievers in Judea.
- By the way, did this happen?
  - Well, “No, but then yes.”
  - Acts tells that story!
  - The Jewish people were stirred into a frenzy and were determined to kill Paul in the Temple.
  - Some even took a vow that they would never eat again until they had killed him.
  - Ultimately, however, Paul was delivered and transported as a prisoner to Rome.
  - So, at first, he was not delivered from unbelievers in Judea, but later he was.

- **Second, Paul also asks for prayer on behalf of the “saints in Jerusalem.”**

- Paul wants Jewish believers in Jerusalem to accept the gift of support from Gentile believers.
- Paul understood just how deep the nationalistic pride of the Jewish people might affect even believers in Jesus Christ.
- Paul knew that this gift from Gentiles to Jewish believers had important, symbolic significance.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down hateful prejudices between various peoples.

- Sadly, some churches in the history of our own country have fallen into this.
  - Regarding the gospel's power to break down divisions between Jews and Gentiles, Paul says it so clearly in Ephesians 2: "That he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."
  - You see, it was no sure thing that Jewish believers would even accept the gift, so Paul asks the Roman believers to intercede for that!

**2) The purpose of his prayer requests (32) – <sup>32</sup> So that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.**

Finally, Paul asks prayer for such things so that after the first leg of the journey, he might be able to make it safely to Rome on the second leg of his journey.

**b. An injection of prayer (33) – <sup>33</sup> May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

Having appealed for their prayer, Paul then closes out the chapter with a final prayer wish for them in verse 33. **Look there.**

This prayer wish is similar to the ones in verses 5 and 13 with the addition of an "amen" at the end. Paul intends this prayer to conclude the whole section—the main section of the whole book.

In his final prayer for them, he prays for what he himself covets. He prays for peace—the God of peace—to be with them all.

- As he considers his risky, dangerous journey to Jerusalem, Paul, no doubt, longs for safety and well-being.
- The older that I get—the farther I go in this journey of life—the more I value peace.
- It is so rare in our world! It's something we should never take for granted.
- So, Paul wanted it or, even better, he wanted the God who gives peace—the source of peace—to be with him in ministry.

But, in a selfless act of love, Paul prays for the God of peace to be with his Roman believers.

## **V. Conclusion (16:1–27)**

In the final chapter of Romans, Paul gives two rounds of salutations. His first greetings are for those in the churches of Rome (1–16) and his second greetings are from those beside him in Corinth (21–24). After each section of greetings, Paul adds another body of material. First, he gives a warning (17–20). Then he gives a final doxology (25–27).

### **A. Salutations & Warning (1–20)**

Today, we will consider the greetings and salutations that Paul extends in Romans 16:1–16. In these verses, Paul gives far more than a list of names. To start with, Paul calls the Roman church to action with these names. They should welcome and help Phoebe and greet everyone else that Paul knows in the church. In these verses, we will learn more of the tender affection that Paul felt toward other believers. He was not a lone ranger, detached from those to whom he ministers. No, Paul enjoyed his brothers and sisters in the Lord and has a lot to say about a lot of people.

Have you ever met someone who seemed to have a lot of friends? Maybe you travelled with them, and it seemed that they had friends everywhere. In the rare occasion, where he or she did not know someone, they quickly made new friends! I have got friends and relatives like this! How about you?

So, what's going on with these people? Well, one answer is that they model the Proverb: *A man who has friends must show himself friendly (Prov 18:24)*. But one of the things you can learn, especially from a believer like this, is that they truly value relationships! They might be wired this way, gaining more and more energy from more and more people, but it must be said that they truly value people.

In this passage, we are going to learn from Paul's holy affection for many believers in Rome. No doubt, Paul wants the Roman believers to greet all those he loves in Romans. So, in our sermon, I call you to assess your own relationships and consider how you might cultivate and express your own appreciation for those you love in Christ.

## 1. Salutations (1–16)

- a. **A brief recommendation (1–2)** – <sup>1</sup> *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae,* <sup>2</sup> *that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

Now, Paul begins in verses 1 and 2 with “a brief recommendation.” **Let's read it.**

The beginning of this chapter is a letter or recommendation. These were popular in ancient times. They would be a way of commending someone to someone else. Paul wants to establish Phoebe in the eyes of the Roman believers.

Now, Paul specifically mentions three qualities of Phoebe that make him eager to commend her to the Roman believers.

- First, she is “our sister” (τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν). This, of course, means that she is a believer. That is pretty straightforward.
- Second, she is a “servant of the church of Cenchreae” (διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κενχρεαῖς). Now, this short description is surprisingly difficult for a few reasons.
  - First, of all, we are not very familiar with ancient geography.
    - For many of us, we are not even too good at modern geography!
    - Good thing for Siri! How many of you would say that you cannot really read a map? How many of you would say that your spouse—Oh, wait! Let's not go there!
  - Cenchreae was a port city of ancient Corinth.
  - It was on the eastern side of Corinth on the Aegean Sea.
  - What is important for us to know about this city is that there was a church there. In this church, Phoebe has been a “servant.”
  - So, Phoebe is not in Rome, but she intends to go there from the same city where Paul is when he writes this letter—Corinth.
  - Consequently, she may be the letter carrier and/or reader.
- Now, that might not feel controversial or difficult, but that is because it is translated “servant.” This word is the word that can be translated “deacon.”

- The question is whether Paul refers to Phoebe as a servant or deaconess of the church.
  - So, which is it? Does Paul here suggest that faithful women can serve as deaconesses?
- Well, to be clear, this passage could go either way and faithful churches have interpreted and applied this in both directions!
    - This is not a matter of orthodoxy. It is a matter where good Christians—perhaps even various Christians in our church—disagree.
    - I have served in Baptist churches with deaconesses and others that did not have them.
  - With those disclaimers in mind, let’s look at the evidence.
    - NT authors use the word *diakonos* 29 times.
    - The word clearly refers to the office of a deacon in three occurrences in the NT (*three of 29 times*).

**Phil 1:1** – Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and **deacons**.

**1 Tim 3:8** – **Deacons** likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

**1 Tim 3:12** – Let **deacons** each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their households well.

- Normally however, the word *diakonos* is used in reference to servants—servants of rulers, of God, of Jesus, or of Satan (*25 of 29 times*).<sup>302</sup> Let’s consider some of these:

**Matt 20:26** – It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your **servant**.

**Matt 23:11** – The greatest among you shall be your **servant**.

**John 2:5, 9** – His mother said to the **servants**, “Do whatever he tells you.” ... When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the **servants** who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

**John 12:26** – If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my **servant** be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

**Rom 13:4** – For he is God’s **servant** for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the **servant** of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.

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<sup>302</sup> The 25 occurrences of *diakonos* that should be translated simply as “servant” are Matt 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5, 9; 12:26; Rom 13:4 (2); 15:8; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:15 (2), 23; Gal 2:17; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Tim 4:6.

**1 Cor 3:5** – What then is Apollos? What is Paul? **Servants** through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

**2 Cor 11:15** – So it is no surprise if his **servants**, also, disguise themselves as **servants** of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

**Eph 3:7** – Of this gospel I was made a **servant** according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

So, most texts (25 of 29) are about “servants”—of Christ, God, the Lord, Satan.

- Now, since this word can mean “deacon” and since she is called a *diakonos* “of the church of Cenchreae,” some translations (*NIV, NLT*) and many believers think we should call Phoebe a deacon or deaconess.
  - Again, this is fine, especially if “deacons” do not exercise authoritative oversight in your church—if they are exceptional servants/ministers to the spiritual and physical needs of the assembly.
  - Phil 1:1 identifies “overseers” as a separate office than “deacons” in the church of Philippi.
  - So, pastors are “overseers,” given authority from Christ to lead the church.
  - They are accountable to Christ, the Scriptures, and the congregation.
  - Now, we believe “overseers/pastors” are to be men, who are empowered by God to meet all the biblical qualifications in 1 Timothy.
  - The Bible describes pastors as “the husband of one wife,” meaning loyal, faithful, men who in theology and/or practice believe that men must be “one-women men.”
  - Whether women serve as “deacons” is a matter of how you take this passage, and good Christians see things differently on this one!
- I hold my own views here with grace. My view is that since ...
  - 1) the word *diakonos* more frequently refers to servants and
  - 2) since when it does refer to deacons in other texts there are clear connections in the context to elders or overseers and
  - 3) since there are *no obvious contextual clues* in Romans 16 that point to taking it as deaconess
- ... I suggest that it is best to see Phoebe simply a servant of God in the church of Cenchreae. She is a sister who is faithfully serving.
- Third, she “has been a patron of many and of myself” (προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ). Phoebe had also demonstrated her faithfulness by supporting others (*including Paul*) with housing, financial support, and other help as a Roman patron or sponsor.

That is Phoebe—sister, servant, patron. So, Paul recommends her so that the Romans would welcome and help her. We do not know what specific way they were to help her (*maybe with food, lodging, and supplies after her long journey*), but maybe even Paul does not know. He does say “in whatever she may need from you” (v. 2b).

- b. **Extended greetings to believers in Rome (3–16)** – <sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. <sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup> Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup> Greet my kinsman Herodian. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. <sup>12</sup> Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. <sup>14</sup> Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. <sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sisters, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. <sup>16</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

That is Paul's brief recommendation. It gives way to an extended greeting to believers in verses 3–16. **Look for the word “greet” as I read through these verses for us.**

I bet some of you are interested in volunteering for this chapter when we have our public reading of Romans in two weeks! In this passage, Paul begins 16 sentences in a row with the verb “greet” (Ἀσπάζασθε), calling the churches of Rome to greet 26 different individuals. This might be every person that Paul knows in Rome!

- This is a long list of greetings.
- Why does Paul greet so many people?
  - Some believe that all these greetings give reason for the Romans to trust Paul.
  - If verses 1–2 give Phoebe's credentials for recommendation, these verses give Paul's.
  - I'd caution against that, however.
  - That is getting into Paul's motives and might assign a semi-selfish motive to him.
  - Instead, the obvious purpose here is greeting—warm greetings.
  - Paul wants the Roman churches to greet all those he knows in the church.

Let's take a moment, however, and see what we can learn as we work quickly through them.

- **Prisca & Aquila (3–5a)** – The first greeting is to go out to Prisca & Aquila. This is the longest one that goes from verses 3 through 5a. Its placement at the beginning and its length are likely attributed to how close Paul was to them. Now, Paul knew them from the time that he spent with them in Corinth and Ephesus. In both locations, they worked with Paul to plant churches. They were also tent-makers in trade like Paul. Years before this, they were deported from Rome because of an edict expelling all Jews from Rome (cf. Acts 18). Now, they are back in Rome. These are shortened versions of their longer names “Priscilla” and “Aquila.” Two important things are mentioned here about them.
  - First, at one time, they “risked their necks” for Paul. That is, they put their lives on the line to rescue Paul. We do not know exactly when that was, it may have been in Ephesus or Corinth, but they stood by Paul to rescue him.
  - Second, we also learn in verse 5 that a church in Rome met in their home. Now, this is something they also did in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor 16:19). The couple likely owned or rented a ground-floor workshop for their business. They opened this up to a church gathering

because the early church did not have church buildings. Interestingly, this is likely the first of three (*or five!*) house churches that are mentioned in the greetings.

This couple is a great example of people who served God with their gifts wherever they went. So, Paul can say that he and “all the Gentile churches” give thanks for this faithful couple. Their radical commitment to God is highly commendable to us!

- **Epaenetus (5b)** – Next, Paul greets the first convert in the city of Ephesus, Epaenetus. No doubt, he was special to Paul.
- **Mary (6)** – Then Paul greets a Mary who has labored faithfully on behalf of the Roman believers.
- **Andronicus & Junia (7)** – Then he says to greet Andronicus and Junia in verse 7. ***Let’s read that one.***
  - This may be a reference to a man and wife.
  - Now, Paul says that they were “well known” to the apostles.
    - This could also be translated “prominent among the apostles.”
    - The difference is whether they were apostles themselves or whether they were just well-known to them.
  - Regardless, this couple was likely older since the original apostles knew them well and they have been believers longer than Paul.
  - Now, Paul adds another description of them that is so easy to just read over.
    - They were his “fellow prisoners.”
    - They spent time with him in prison!
    - I am sure Paul’s relationship with these two was deep, forged in the fires of persecution.
- **Ampliatius, Urbanus & Stachys (8–9)** – Then he greets three people that he loves in verses 8 and 9—Ampliatius, Urbanus, and Stachys.
- **Apelles (10a)** – In verse 10, he says to send greetings to “Apellus” who is “approved in Christ.” While we do not know much about Apelles, evidently he had been tested in some hardship and was approved.
- **The family of Aristobulus (10b)** – The “family of Aristobulus” probably refers to a royal household that sprung from a man who had already died. Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great and brother of Agrippa 1. He died between 45–48 A.D. This family might represent another house church in Rome.
- **Herodian & the family of Narcissus (11)** – Paul asks the Roman believer to greet Herodian and the family of Narcissus. Narcissus may have also been an important man who had died. Regardless, Paul sends greetings to his family. Perhaps, this is another house church.
- **Tryphaena & Tryphosa and Persis (12)** – In verse 12, he sends greetings to Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis. We do not know much about these three. The first two are likely sisters. The three are beloved and faithful.

- **Rufus & his mother (13)** – In verse 13, Paul says a bit more about Rufus and his mother. **Read verse 13.**
  - Rufus is a Roman or Latin name. It is a nickname that meant “red head.”
    - That is something special for our family! Finally, a red head in the Bible!
  - Now, this might be the son of the man who carried the cross of Jesus—Simon of Cyrene.
    - The reason that I say this is that the Gospel writer, Mark, originally wrote his gospel to Roman believers and he specifically mentions that Simon was the father of Rufus in Mark 15:21.
    - He is the only Gospel writer to mention this and he does so apparently because he knew his readers would know Rufus.
    - So, this Rufus might be the son of the man who carried Jesus’s cross.
    - That would make his mother likely the wife of Simon of Cyrene.
  - Paul says that his mother was very close to him as well (*she had been a mother to him!*).
  - No doubt, she was an elderly woman by this point who had ministered faithfully to many people, maybe even Jesus & Paul!
    - What faithful reward this ministering woman must have in glory!
    - Like many of the women who failed to abandon Jesus at the cross!
    - You do not have to be prominent or named to draw Jesus’s attention.
- **Two house churches (14–15)** – Then, Paul starts listing out names rapidly in verses 14 and 15. He mentions five in verse 14 and another five in verse 15. So, ten more! But more than that because in both verses Paul adds “and the brothers who are with them/and all the saints who are with them” (vv. 14b, 15b). Consequently, it seems that Paul is sending greetings to two house churches in verses 14 and 15.
- **One another (16)** – Finally, in verse 16, Paul gives a more general greeting. They are to greet one another affectionately with a “holy kiss.”
  - Both words are important here in this cultural expression of their love.
    - “Holy” adds solemnity (*appropriateness*) or purity to the action.
    - “Kiss” adds affection to the action.
    - Now, kissing was a culturally accepted practice of greeting.
    - Do you remember when Jesus rebuked a host who failed to welcome him with a kiss?
    - It was a cultural practice, but Paul adds the word “holy” to make sure that this mark of affection was appropriate.
    - So, we must welcome one another in affectionate, but never inappropriate ways for our own pleasure or in a way that would make someone else uncomfortable.
    - We are to show “holy” affection to one another!
  - But Paul is not done with greetings.
  - He ends with a greeting for the Roman churches from “all the churches of Christ.”
  - He can speak this way because he is an apostle to the nations.
  - All the churches Paul is connected with him send greeting to the Roman believers.

So, Paul greets 26 people in 16 different greetings. If this church joins Paul and helps him with his goal to reach Spain with the gospel, then they will be joining in with all the churches of Jesus.

Obviously, Paul loves these believers and longs to see them. When he thinks of these 26 individuals, warm thoughts and memories pop into his head. Do you have these kinds of Christian relationships? Why not? Work to make them. Do not settle into selfishness! Be warm and friendly. Rise above normalcy/blandness! And then take moments to reflect and communicate with those in Christ who mean much to us! Perhaps there are some letters/emails that you need to compose this Christmas to those you love in Christ. May God give us holy affection for one another and the church of Christ around the world!

## 2. Warning (17–20)

Romans 16 is built on greetings. There are two rounds of greetings in verses 1–16 and 21–23. I see two main sections that include greetings than either a sober warning (17–20) or doxology (25–27). Two weeks ago, we looked at the first greetings. Today, we will consider the rest of the chapter that involves a warning, more greetings, and a doxology.

These final things go from a sudden, shocking warning to the longest, most powerful doxology in the whole Bible! You see, in this part of Romans, Paul shoots from emotional depths to emotional heights, ending on the tallest mountain!

When I was in college, I had the opportunity to play basketball.

- It was the privilege of being tall, I guess.
- Well, at the beginning of my junior year, our team travelled to Alaska to play in a tournament.
- One day, we had some free time, so we took a trip to Mount Alyeska outside Anchorage, Alaska.
  - Being raised in Pennsylvania, I thought that I had seen mountains before, but those were only hills!
  - We arrived at the foot of the mountain on a foggy day.
  - So, all we could really see was the foot of the mountain.
  - But then we took a few lifts up.
  - We went higher and higher until we arrived near the top of the mountain.
  - I remember actually being in the fog/clouds for a few minutes until we broke through and saw the sun above the clouds.
  - I will never forget getting off the last lift and walking to an overlook where we looked down on the carpet of clouds below us!

Near the end of Romans, we will take a trip something like this! We will start on a difficult, negative topic—a warning. We will end above it all, focusing on the only, wise God.

So, let's pray and ask God to move us as we climb this last mountain in Romans together!

In verses 17–20, Paul injects a sudden warning. The mention of two-house churches near the end of the greetings (vv. 14–15) leads Paul to warn about the dangers of people who divide churches.

- a. The nature of the error (17b) –** *For those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught.*

Paul begins the warning with a two-fold description of the nature of the error in the middle of verse 17. **Let's read the whole verse.**

Paul is warning about people who create two types of problems in the church—1) those who cause disruption by dividing the church into different groups and 2) those who create stumbling blocks that harm believers.

- Now, Paul could have named the individuals he has in mind (*if he had specific people in mind*); instead, he describes them.
- In describing them, it becomes much easier for other churches to apply what he says in their own contexts.
- There are dangerous people affecting many churches who like to splinter and divide the church into different groups and who manufacture obstacles to trip up believers.

Another word should be made regarding the nature of their division-sowing and obstacle-creating. They do these things “contrary to the doctrine” (παρὰ τὴν διδασχὴν) that they’ve been taught.

- You see, there is a body of teaching/doctrine in the Bible established by Jesus and the apostles from which we cannot move!
  - A mark of the early church was devotion to the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42).
  - Elders must be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9).
  - Concerning the Roman believers, Paul earlier thanked God that though they were slaves of sin, they now obey from the heart the “standard” or “form” of doctrine that was delivered to them (Rom 6:17).
- Instead of being drawn to the novel—the new—latest cultural and theological trends—we must be devoted to discovering and obeying the doctrine established in Scripture.

**b. The call to obey (17a,c) – <sup>17</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out ... avoid them.**

Now, the actual call for the Roman believers to obey is two-fold as well. In verse 17, Paul calls them to 1) watch out for these divisive people and 2) to avoid them. **Read verse 17.**

**1) Watch out (σκοπεῖν)!**

- Paul begins by calling them to “watch out for” or to “look out for” these troubling people in the church.
  - The rare word for “watch out” is used once by Jesus in Luke 11:35 as a warning: *See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.*
  - Christ talks about how people can so easily be deceived internally that they actually think they are believers.
  - He says, “Watch out” that this is not true of you!
- Paul uses this word to call believers to look out for divisive people in the church.
- Churches who hope to follow Paul’s instructions here must somehow be alert to the threat of people who divide churches.

**2) Avoid them (καὶ ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν)!**

- Then, at the end of the verse, Paul calls the Roman believers to “avoid” or “turn away from” these kinds of people.
- It’s not enough to identify threats to the harmony and unity of the church, we must turn away from them.

That is the two-fold call to obedience—watch out and avoid!

### c. The reasons to obey (18–19)

To these simple commands, Paul offers two reasons for obedience in verses 18 and 19. You can see that these are reasons by Paul’s repetition of the word “for” (γάρ) at the beginning of verses 18 and 19 (note “for” in verses 18 and 19). **So, let’s look at the first one in verse 18.**

**1) Because these people are selfish and deceitful (18) –**<sup>18</sup> *For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.*

In verse 18, Paul points out the obvious reason why avoiding false teachers is necessary. This reason has to do with the destructive nature of the teachers themselves. They must avoid them because the teachers are selfish and deceitful.

- **Selfish** – The first two phrases in verse 18 directly relate to each other. Instead of serving our Lord, these people serve their own appetites. In the original, both “Lord” and “appetites” start with a *kappa*. That is, Paul alliterates this description. Instead of serving the Lord, they serve their lusts.
  - What becomes obvious is that “their religion is actually a camouflage for self-promotion.”<sup>303</sup>
  - Behind their teaching is idolatry. They serve their own appetites—their own bellies.
  - These kind of people use their platform in the church to feed their own promotion and they do so through flattery and good appearances.
    - You see, false teachers are not normally mean and cruel.
    - They would not get much of a following that way.
    - No, they are likeable and smooth!
    - Because they are so popular, standing against them will not be easy!
    - Sometimes, sadly, the niceness of these people veils the dangers associated with their teaching until it is too late for their victims.
  - An important diagnostic question regarding possible false teachers is if they seek their own agenda or the peace and unity of the church!
- **Deceitful** – The next description of them is about how they use eloquence (*sweet preachings; lovely words*) to mislead the naïve—the people who lack in evil. These people eloquently spin things to deceive unsuspecting people.

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<sup>303</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 803.

So, because these false teachers are selfish and eloquently deceitful, the Roman believers must avoid them entirely.

**2) Because everyone knows your full obedience (19) – <sup>19</sup> For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.**

But, in verse 19, there is another reason they should avoid them. They should do so because everyone knows the way that the Roman churches obey. **Let's look at verse 19.**

The churches of Rome had a reputation for obedience that brought Paul great joy!

- Their obedience was a matter of public knowledge.
- Churches in other locations were not so prone to obedience (see the *Corinthian letters*, for instance), but the Roman believers were quick to conform to what the Scriptures require.
- Since Paul's entire ministry was for the "obedience of the faith" (1:5; 16:26) and the "obedience of the Gentiles" (15:18), the Roman believers' "obedience" (ὁπακοή) brings him much joy!
- And this testimony of full obedience was a reason they must reject the false teachers.

To this brief testimony of their obedience, Paul appends an important, little statement of final warning. Paul says, "But I want you to be wise to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." Now, where did Paul get this statement? Well, I have two answers here.

- First, the word "evil" is a play on words with the word he just mentioned at the end of verse 18—"naïve." The words are related. They are exact opposites.
- Second, however, it is likely that Paul got this idea from Jesus.
  - As Christ was sending out his disciples, he said that they must "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16).
  - But what is at the heart of these statements?
    - Some people believe that they will only fully appreciate goodness as they are educated in evil.
    - Yet, these statements teach that we should be shrewd and given to knowing good and not even beginners in evil.
    - So, instead of learning more about the drunkenness and drugs and immoral sex and the foul minds and mouths of our cultural influencers, we should get off our phones and get into our Bibles.
      - We need young people who will become experts regarding the good and innocent regarding the evil.
      - We need elderly who turn off their TVs and turn in their Bibles.

Now, before we leave this dramatic warning against the dangers of divisive, selfish people harming the church, Paul gives a final assurance of victory in verse 20.

**d. The assurance of victory (20)**

This is where we begin to climb!

Paul's assurances have to do with the ultimate destruction of the enemy and the abiding presence of God's grace. I will not say much about these but look with me at how Paul gives these assurances in verse 20.

**1) Destruction of the enemy (20a) – <sup>20</sup> *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.***

The first assurance involves the destruction of Satan.

- Interestingly, Satan has not been explicitly referred to in Romans to this point, yet here Paul assures that God will soon crush Satan under our feet.
- Now, this is a clear allusion to the famous, significant statement that God made to the serpent in the garden.
  - In Gen 3:15, God told the serpent that the seed of the woman would one day crush his head!
  - In that chapter, at the curse of the serpent, God initiates a powerful metaphor.
    - The metaphor is of a snake at our heels.
    - How does that initially sound to you—a snake at your heels?
    - I have to admit that it sounds terrifying to me!
    - But this metaphor is designed to not only curse Satan, it is designed to encourage sinful humanity.
    - One day, God will crush Satan under our feet.
  - In Romans 16, Paul understands that the church is the victorious seed of the woman who will soon crush Satan's head.
  - You see, Paul wants to end Romans with an assurance that Satan's doom is sure!
- Satan is the great opponent of the church who constantly threatens and harasses the church through things like people who sow divisions and create trip hazards before Christians to serve their own passions.
- One day soon, however, God will crush Satan under our feet.

**2) Declaration of sustaining grace (20b) – *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.***

Paul adds to that stunning declaration another that is his prayer wish for Christ's grace to be with the Roman believers as they move forward. These final assurances in verse 20 are a positive way to end Paul's first round of greetings and warnings in verses 1–20.

**B. Greetings & Doxology (21–27)**

Then, Paul gives another round of greetings and a doxology.

**1. Greetings (21–23)**

The greetings come from those with Paul in Corinth.

**a. From four brothers in Corinth (21) – <sup>21</sup> *Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.***

He starts with four Christian brothers in Corinth—Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater.

- Timothy was Paul's frequent companion in ministry. He co-authored six books of the NT with Paul.
- He sends greetings from Corinth with Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater.
  - These last three men are probably not originally from Corinth, but are with him there because they are the official delegation that will deliver the gift from Macedonia and Achaia to the Jerusalem church.
  - Jason was the man who housed Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–9) and Sosipater was likely from Berea (cf. Acts 20:4).

**b. From the letter writer in Corinth (22) – <sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.**

Paul then allows his writing scribe—the one who actually penned Romans—to add his own greeting. Verse 22 is the one verse where Tertius (*name means three*) can add his own thoughts; and it is a simple greeting to those in Rome.

**c. From three more brothers in Corinth (23) – <sup>23</sup> Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.**

Finally, in verse 23, Paul adds greetings from three other brothers in Corinth—Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus.

- Gaius allowed his house to be used for the gatherings of the church(es?) of Corinth.<sup>304</sup>
- He sends his greetings, along with Erastus (*a converted city official*) and Quartus (*his name means four*).

These greetings from eight significant brothers located temporarily with Paul in Corinth convey only enhance the significance of this letter from Paul to the Romans.

## **2. Doxology (25–27)**

After the greetings, Paul closes the book with a powerful doxology. This is the longest doxology in Paul's writings.<sup>305</sup> As we come to the end of Romans, Paul wants to end by giving exuberant praise to God. Paul is landing the plane, the wheels are down, the flaps are back, and the engine is beginning to slow, but as we look out the windows, all we see is a tall mountain! It is like Paul is landing the plane on a mountain! Like a grand finale. **So, look with me at verses 25–27.**

**a. Ascribing glory to the One who strengthens us (25–26) – <sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—**

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<sup>304</sup> I am not quite sure what the phrase “the whole church” means about whether there were multiple house churches in Corinth or whether all believers in Corinth gathered in Gaius' house. It is obvious in Rom 16:2, however, that another group met in Phoebe's home in Cenchreae.

<sup>305</sup> Outside of Romans, other Pauline doxologies are found in Gal 1:5, Eph 3:20–21, Phil 4:20, 1 Tim 1:17, and 2 Tim 4:18.

At the heart of this doxology is Paul's desire to praise God! That is what doxologies are all about! Now, Paul actually identifies God two times directly in this passage—once at the beginning of verse 25 and again at the beginning of verse 27. We cannot look at everything in these verses, but let's consider briefly what he says here.

First, Paul praises the One who is able to strengthen you. The word for “strengthen” bears the meaning of establishing, making someone stand. Paul knew that God was able to make the Roman believers stand.

Then he reveals the manner in which God does this in the three “according to” statements in verses 25–26. Now, one might wonder how God will strengthen and establish believers. In 1 Peter 5, Peter says that “the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” The remaining question is how. How will God do this?

- Well, Paul uncovers the manner and the means with which God makes believers stand in this part of the doxology. It is through the gospel that Paul shares—the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also through what Paul's been preaching “about Jesus Christ.” You see, God settles and establishes believers through the gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ.
  - This is why we are wise to know the gospel and conform to the gospel as believers. This is why believers should keep the gospel central to their lives.
  - This is also why preaching is important! It is the manner in which God makes the church stand. The normal means by which God strengthens us is the gospel and preaching! The daily and weekly provisions that bring strength!
- The manner of God's strengthening of the church is also “according to.” It is according to 1) the revelation of God's mystery now revealed to the church and 2) in accord with the command of the eternal God to accomplish the obedience of faith. The eternal God determined before the foundation of the world that all the nations would hear the gospel of Christ to accomplish the obedience of faith.

Paul knows that God is the One who is able to strengthen us. So, Paul assigns or ascribes glory—weightiness, honor—to Him! Now, he has talked about God's glory in many other places in Romans—in just about every chapter! (13 of 16) Let me review just three of those with you!

- In Romans 1, we learned that humanity sinfully chooses to exchange the glory (*the significant weightiness*) of God for things less valuable. In other words, we choose that God's glory is less valuable than a whole host of idols—less valuable than our own passions, less valuable than food, less valuable than sex, less valuable than praise, less valuable than our own careers. So, we “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (1:23a).
- Then, in Romans 3, we learn that God's glory is the standard by which we are all measured! Wow! That is bad news! Rom 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.” Of course, we are sinners and none of us can stand! But Romans explains that as we believe in Jesus Christ and turn from our sins, we can once again see the “glory of God” in hope as something truly glorious!
- That brings us to our third passage in Romans where Paul assigns or ascribes glory to God at another high point in the book. Do you remember the end of Romans 11? Paul says, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (11:36).

So, Paul ends Romans with two mountain peaks (*Rom 11, 15*), assigning God glory forever through Jesus Christ! That is Paul's earnest desire as a believer in Jesus Christ!

- Is that your strongest, most consuming, desire?
  - Do you long to see God receive all the glory that He deserves?
  - He saved you through the gift of His Son. Do you long for Him to be honored?
  - You have gone the whole way or halfway through our Romans series. Is there anything going on in your heart?
  - Is anything stirred or is there deadness and the lack of any true longing for God in your heart?
  - Do you see our glorious God as the most valuable pursuit in your life?
- May that be for us!

When we came off the ski lift at the top of Mount Alyeska, you could not help but gasp in awe!

- Today, we have climbed Paul's mountain peak, and we have briefly consider his intense desire to ascribe or give glory to the One who is able to strengthen us!
  - We have painted His view of God!
- Does all this make you gasp?
  - Is this the cry of your heart?
  - God wants your attention today!
  - If you are totally unengaged in this room today—just wishing for this to be over, so you can move along—it is my prayer for you that God will overcome your callous, hard heart and show you that you were made to glorify God!

**b. Ascribing glory to the only wise God (27) – <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

In verse 27, Paul describes God in one other way, adding one final characterization. He is the “only wise God.”

- Paul stresses here the oneness (*monotheism*) of God but also adds a description of God that again conforms to his doxology at the end of Romans 11.
  - Paul had exclaimed there—“O the depths of the wisdom of God!”
  - Now, he closes by ascribing glory to the only wise God.
- And what a fitting way to end the book of Romans.
  - There is no better way to end it!
  - Romans is a call to glorify God in knowing the gospel, being conformed to the gospel, and partnering together to proclaim the gospel.

So, as the well-known German protestant—Adolf Schlatter—said, Paul's final prayer is essentially *solī deo gloria*—glory be to God alone.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Adolf Schlatter asks, “Could there be a more fitting conclusion for Romans than the *solī deo gloria*?” Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, 280.