

# Introductory Notes to Romans

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## I. Importance

While all Scripture is inspired of God and profitable, there are some parts of the Bible that contain more doctrinal truth than others. Certainly what Paul has to say in Romans is of more practical value to us than some of the lists in Numbers. St. Augustine was converted through reading Romans. Martin Luther launched the Reformation on Rom. 1:17: "The just shall live by faith." John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was converted while listening to someone read from Luther's commentary on Romans. If there is one book that every Christian should understand, it is this epistle. Why?

(1) It presents doctrinal truth—justification, sanctification, adoption, judgment, and identification with Christ.

(2) It presents dispensational truth in chapters 9–11, showing the relationship between Israel and the church in the eternal plan of God.

(3) It presents practical truth, teaching the secret of Christian victory over the flesh, the duties Christians have toward each other, and their relationship to government.

Romans is a great exposition of the faith. It is the complete and most logical presentation of Christian truth in the entire NT. While some topics (such as the priesthood of Christ and the return of the Lord) are not dealt with in detail, they are mentioned and related to the other great doctrines of the faith.

If a Bible student wishes to master any one book of the Bible, let it be Romans! An understanding of this book is a key to unlocking the entire Word of God.

## II. Background

Romans was written by Paul during his three-month visit in Corinth (Acts 20:1–3). In Rom. 16:23 he indicates that he was with Gaius and Erastus, both of whom are associated with Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:20). The letter was probably carried by Phoebe (16:1), who lived at Cenchræa, the seaport that served Corinth (Acts 18:18). Paul's friends Aquila and Priscilla were originally from Rome (Acts 18:2), and from the greeting to them in Rom. 16:3, we discover that they are back in Rome.

How did there come to be groups of believers at Rome? Note that Paul does not address his letter to "the church at Rome" but rather "to all that be at Rome" (1:7). When you read chapter 16, you cannot help but note different groups of believers, which suggests that there was not one local assembly (16:5, 10–11, 14–15). One tradition, without historical or scriptural foundation, is that the ministry at Rome was founded by Peter. It is claimed that Peter lived in Rome for twenty-five years, but this fact cannot be proved. If Peter had started the work at Rome, then certainly there would have been an organized church rather than scattered bodies of believers. Paul greets many friends in chapter 16, but not Peter; yet in his other letters, he always sent greetings to spiritual

leaders. Certainly somewhere in his prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Timothy) Paul would have mentioned Peter if that great apostle were ministering anywhere in Rome. The most telling argument against Peter as the founder of the work in Rome is Romans 15:20, where Paul states that he did not build on another man's foundation. Paul was anxious to visit Rome to minister to the saints there (1:13; 15:22–24, 28, 29; Acts 19:21; 23:11); but he would not have made these plans if another apostle had already started the work there.

How, then, did the Gospel get to Rome? Acts 2:10 indicates that there were people at Pentecost from Rome. Priscilla and Aquila were Roman Jews who knew the Gospel. Note that the names in chapter 16 are all Gentile, indicating that Gentile Christians from other cities had gravitated to Rome and carried the Gospel with them. These people were probably converts of Paul from other churches. Rome was the great center of the world in that day, and it was not unlikely that thousands of pilgrims made their way over Roman highways to the imperial city. Romans 1:13–15, 11:13 and 15:14–16 all indicate that the majority of the believers who received the letter were Gentiles. Naturally there was also a Jewish element in this Christian community as well as many Gentiles who had been Jewish proselytes.

### III. Reason for Writing

Paul was about to close his work in Asia (15:19) and go to Jerusalem with his love gift from the churches of Asia (15:25–26). His heart's burden had always been to preach at Rome, and this long letter was his way of preparing the Christians for his coming. While at Corinth (Acts 20:1–3) he also wrote his letter to the Galatians, seeking to answer the Judaizers who were confusing the churches of Galatia. Paul may have wanted to warn and teach the Christians at Rome lest these Judaizers arrive there before him and upset his plans. Note that in Rom. 3:8 he mentions false accusations certain men had made about him. Paul's reasons, then, for the letter may be summarized as follows:

(1) To prepare the Christians for this planned visit, and to explain why he had not visited them sooner (1:8–15; 15:23–29).

(2) To instruct them in the basic doctrines of the Christian faith lest false teachers upset them.

(3) To explain the relationship between Israel and the church, lest the Judaizers lead them astray with their doctrines.

(4) To teach the Christians their duties to one another and to the state.

(5) To answer any slander about Paul (3:8).

### IV. Position in the Bible

Romans is the first of three letters in the NT based on one verse of Scripture—Hab. 2:4, "The just shall live by his faith." This verse is found in Rom. 1:17 (the theme of Romans is *the just*), Gal. 3:11 (the theme of Galatians is how the just *shall live*), and Heb. 10:38 (the theme of Hebrews is living *by faith*).

Romans is the first epistle in the NT. You will note that the order of the NT letters follows 2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for ...":

*Doctrine*—Romans (the great doctrinal book)

*Reproof*—1 and 2 Corinthians (where Paul reproofs sin)

*Correction*—Galatians (where Paul corrects false teaching)

*Instruction in righteousness*—Ephesians and Paul's remaining letters (where Paul teaches holy living based on Christian doctrine)

## **V. Theme**

Paul's basic theme is the righteousness of God. The word "righteous" in one form or another is used over forty times in these chapters. In chapters 1–3 he presents the need for righteousness; in 3–8, God's provision of righteousness in Christ; in 9–11, how Israel rejected God's righteousness; and in 12–16, how righteousness must be lived in daily practice.

# **Romans 1**

## **I. Salutation (1:1–7)**

All thirteen of Paul's letters begin with the apostle's name. It was customary in those days to open a letter with the writer's name and personal greeting, rather than place them at the end, as we do today. Paul identifies himself as a servant and an apostle, and gives all the glory to God by saying that he was called by God's grace (v. 5) and separated unto this wonderful ministry (see Acts 13:1–3).

He immediately states that his ministry is that of the Gospel, which he calls "the Gospel of God" (v. 1), the "Gospel of His Son" (v. 9), and the "Gospel of Christ" (v. 16). He states that this "Good News" is not something new that he invented, but that the OT promised the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection. (See 1 Cor. 15:1–4, where "the Scriptures" obviously means the OT writings, since the NT was then being written.) By relating the Gospel to the OT, Paul appealed to the Jewish believers reading his letter.

The Gospel concerns Christ: according to the flesh, a Jew (v. 3), but according to God's power through the resurrection, proved to be the very Son of God (v. 4). This proves the humanity and deity of the God-Man who alone can be our Mediator. What is the purpose of this Gospel that cost Christ His life? Verse 5 tells us: to bring all nations into obedience to the faith. When a person truly trusts Christ, he or she will obey Him.

In vv. 6–7, Paul describes his readers, the saints in Rome. They are also "called" by Christ, not to be apostles, but to be saints. Note that a saint is a living believer in Jesus Christ. Only God can make a sinner into a saint! They are also "beloved of God," even though they live in the wicked city of Rome! How wonderful it is that God calls us "beloved" just as He did His Son (Matt. 3:17). Jesus states that the Father loves us just as the Father loves Him (John 17:23)!

In this brief salutation, then, Paul identifies: (1) the writer, himself; (2) the recipients, the saints at Rome (and not unbelievers); (3) the theme, Christ and the Gospel of salvation.

## II. Explanation (1:8–17)

Paul now gives a two-fold explanation of (1) why he is writing, (vv. 8–15); and (2) what he is writing about (vv. 16–17).

For a long time, Paul had desired to visit the saints in Rome. Their testimony had spread throughout the Roman Empire (v. 8, and see 1 Thes. 1:5–10), and Paul was anxious to visit them for three reasons: (1) that he might help establish them in the faith, v. 11; (2) that they might be a blessing to him, v. 12; and (3) that he might “have some fruit” among them, that is, win other Gentiles to the Lord, v. 13. Keep in mind that Paul was the chosen messenger of God to the Gentiles, and he certainly would have a burden for the saints (and sinners) in the capital of the empire! He explains that he had been hindered (“let,” v. 13, in KJV) from visiting them sooner, not by Satan (see 1 Thes. 2:18), but by his many opportunities to minister elsewhere (Rom. 15:19–23). Now that the work was ended in those areas, he could visit Rome. Note the motivating forces in Paul’s life (vv. 14–16): “I am debtor ... I am ready ... I am not ashamed.” We would do well to emulate the apostle’s example in our lives.

In vv. 16–17 we have the theme of the letter: the Gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness of God, a righteousness based on faith and not works, and available to all, not just the Jews. Paul explains in Romans how God can be both “just and justifier,” that is, how He can make sinners righteous and still uphold His own holy law. He quotes Hab. 2:4 (see introductory notes), “The just shall live by faith.”

## III. Condemnation (1:18–32)

We now begin the first section of the letter, which discusses sin (1:18–3:20—see outline). In these closing verses of chapter 1, Paul explains how the Gentiles got into the awful darkness that engulfs them and how God’s wrath was revealed against them. Note the steps downward in Gentile history:

### A. *They knew God (vv. 18–20).*

God had given them a twofold revelation of Himself “in them” (conscience) and “unto them” (creation), v. 19. Man did not begin with ignorance and gradually work his way up to intelligence; he began with a blazing revelation of the power and wisdom of God and turned his back on it. God had revealed Himself from the very time of creation, so that people who have never heard the Gospel are still without excuse. (How God judges such people will be taken up in chap. 2.)

### B. *They glorified Him not as God (vv. 21–23).*

Vain thinking and foolish reasoning turned men from the truth to lies. We see indifference leading to ingratitude, resulting in ignorance. People today bow before the Greek and Roman philosophers and honor their words above the Word of God; but Paul calls all of these philosophies “empty imaginations” and “times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30)! The next step was idolatry, honoring the creature (including man) rather than the Creator.

*C. They changed the truth of God (vv. 24–25).*

This word “changed” should really read “exchanged.” People replaced God’s truth with Satan’s lie! What is Satan’s lie? Worshiping the creature and not the Creator; worshiping man instead of God; worshiping things instead of Christ. Satan tempted Christ to do this (Matt. 4:8–11). Note that in Rom. 1:18, the Gentiles “held down the truth,” and now they “exchange the truth” for a lie! The truth believed and obeyed sets us free (John 8:31–32); the truth rejected and disobeyed makes us slaves.

*D. They rejected the knowledge of God (vv. 26–32).*

These people had begun with a clear knowledge of God (vv. 19, 21) and His judgment against sin (v. 32); but now they reached the lowest level of their downward fall: they did not even want to have knowledge of God! “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (Ps. 14:1, NKJV).

It is sad to see the tragic results of this decline. Evolutionists want us to believe that humans have “evolved” from primitive, ignorant, beast-like forms into the marvelous creature they are today. Paul says just the opposite: man began the highest of God’s creatures, but he made himself into a beast! Note the three judgments of God:

God gave them up to uncleanness and idolatry, vv. 24–25.

God gave them over to vile passions, vv. 26–27.

God gave them over to a reprobate mind, vv. 28ff.

God gave them up! This is the revelation of the wrath of God (v. 18). The sins listed here are too vile to define or discuss, yet they are practiced today around the world with the approval of society. People know that sin will be judged, yet they take pleasure in it anyway. Were it not for the Gospel of Christ, we would be in this slavery to sin ourselves. “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

## Romans 2

From 2:1 to 3:8, Paul turns the searchlight on his own people, the Jews, and shows that they are equally condemned as sinners before God. In 1:20 he states that the Gentiles are without excuse, and in 2:1 he states that the Jews are without excuse. This news comes as a thunderbolt to the privileged Jews! Surely God would deal with them, they thought, differently from the Gentiles! No, states Paul; the Jews are under the condemnation and wrath of God because God’s principles of judgment are fair. In this chapter he points out three divine principles of judgment that prove the Jew is equally condemned with the Gentile.

### **I. Judgment is According to God’s Truth (2:1–5)**

As the Jew read Paul’s indictment of the “heathen” in the first chapter, he must have smiled and said, “Serves them right!” Their attitude would have been that of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14—“I thank Thee that I am not as other men!” But Paul turns the Jew’s judgment of the Gentile right back upon him: “You do the same things the Gentiles do, so you are just as guilty!” God’s judgment of men is not according to

hearsay, gossip, our own good opinions, or man's evaluations; it is "according to truth" (v. 2). Someone has said, "We hate our own faults, especially when we see them in others." How easy it is for people today, as in Paul's day, to condemn others, yet have the very same sins in their own lives.

But the Jew may have argued back: "Surely God wouldn't judge us with the same truth He applies to the Gentiles! Why, see how good God has been to Israel!" But they were ignorant of the purpose God had in mind when He poured out His goodness on Israel and waited so patiently for His people to obey: His goodness was supposed to lead them to repentance. Instead, they hardened their hearts and thus stored up more wrath for that day when Christ will judge the lost (Rev. 20). Have you not heard lost sinners today say, "Oh, I'm sure God isn't going to send me to hell. Why, He's done so many good things for me." Little do they realize that God's goodness is the preparation for His grace; and instead of bowing in humble gratitude, they harden their hearts and commit more sin, thinking that God loves them too much to condemn them.

These same two "excuses" that the Jews used in Paul's day are still heard today: (1) "I am better than others, so I don't need Christ"; (2) "God has been good to me and will certainly never condemn me." But God's final judgment will not be according to men's opinions and evaluations; it will be according to truth.

## **II. Judgment Is According to a Person's Deeds (2:6–16)**

The Jews thought they held the highest "status" among God's people, not realizing that it is one thing to be a hearer of the Law, and quite another to be a doer (v. 13). Keep in mind that these verses do not tell us how to be saved. They describe how God judges mankind according to the deeds performed in the course of life. Verses 7–8 are not talking about a person's occasional actions, but the total purpose and drift of his life, the "life-choice" as William Newell describes it. People do not get eternal life by patiently seeking it; but if they are seeking for life, they will find it in Christ.

"Every man" (v. 6), "every soul" (v. 9), "every man" (v. 10)—these phrases show that God is no respecter of persons but judges all mankind on the basis of the lives they have lived. One might ask, "But is God just in judging men this way? After all, the Jews have had the Law and the Gentiles did not." Yes, God is just, as vv. 12–15 explain. God will judge people according to the light they have received. But never think that the Gentiles (who were unaware of Moses) lived apart from law; for the moral law of God was written on their hearts (see 1:19). Dan Crawford, veteran missionary to Africa, came out of the jungles and said, "The heathen are sinning against a flood of light." "It is most evident from Scripture," writes Dr. Roy Laurin, "that men will be judged according to the knowledge of God which they possess and never according to any higher standard they do not possess." The Jews hear the Law but refuse to do it, and will be thus judged more severely. The same will happen to sinners who hear God's Word today but will not heed it.

### **III. Judgment Is According to the Gospel of Christ (2:17–29)**

Twice now Paul has mentioned a “day of judgment” (vv. 5 and 16). Now he states that this judgment will be of the heart, when God will reveal all secrets. Christ will be the Judge, and the issue will be, “What did you do with the Gospel of Christ?”

The Jews boasted of their racial and religious privileges. Because God had given them His Word, they knew His will and had a finer sense of values. They looked upon the Gentiles as blind, in the dark, fools, and babes (vv. 19–20). The Jews considered themselves to be God’s exclusive favorites; but what they failed to see was that these very privileges obligated them to live holy lives. They disobeyed themselves the very law they preached to the Gentiles. The result was that even the “wicked Gentiles” blasphemed God’s name because of the sins of the Jews! Paul is referring perhaps to Isa. 52:5, Ezek. 36:21–22, or Nathan’s words to David in 2 Sam. 12:14.

If any people had “religion,” it was the Jews; yet their religion was a matter of outward ceremony and not inward reality. They boasted of their rite of circumcision, a ceremony that identified them with the living God; yet what good is a physical rite if there is no obedience to God’s Word? Paul even goes so far as to say that the uncircumcised Gentile who obeyed God’s Word was better off than the circumcised Jew who disobeyed it (v. 27), and that the circumcised Jew who disobeyed God was looked upon as uncircumcised! For a true Jew is one who has faith inwardly, whose heart has been changed, and not one who merely follows outward ceremonies in the flesh. Verse 27 boldly states that the Gentiles who by nature, though uncircumcised, fulfill the Law are going to judge the Jews who transgress God’s standards!

The Gospel of Christ demands an inward change: “You must be born again” (John 3:7). It is not obedience to a religious system that will allow one to pass the test when Christ judges the secrets of men’s hearts. It is the Gospel of Christ that is God’s power unto salvation, both to Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1:16). If a person has never believed the Gospel and received Christ, then he or she stands condemned. The Jews, with all their religion and legalism, were (and are) just as much under sin as the Gentiles—and more so, because to them were given greater privileges and opportunities to know the truth.

How many people are going to hell because they think God is going to judge them according to their own good opinion of themselves, their status, or their religion? God does not judge according to these principles, but according to truth, according to our deeds, and according to the Gospel of Christ. Thus, in chapter 1 Paul proves that the Gentiles are without excuse, and here in chapter 2, that the Jews are without excuse. In chapter 3, he will prove that the whole world is under sin and condemnation, desperately needing the grace of God.

# Romans 3

This chapter forms the bridge between Section 1 “Sin” and Section 2 “Salvation.” In the first section (vv. 1–20), Paul deals with condemnation and concludes that the whole world—Jew and Gentile alike—is under sin. In the last section (vv. 21–31), he introduces the theme of justification by faith, which will be his theme in the next two chapters.

In fact, chapter 3 is really the seedbed for the rest of the book. In vv. 1–4, he deals with Israel’s unbelief, and this is his subject in chapters 9–11. In v. 8, he mentions the question of living in sin, and this matter is discussed in chapters 6–8. (Note that 3:8 is closely related to 6:1.) Verse 21 brings up the topic of justification by faith, his theme for chapters 4–5. Finally, in v. 31, he mentions establishing and obeying the law, the theme presented in chapters 12–16 (note 13:8–14).

## I. The Bad News: Condemnation Under Sin (3:1–20)

Paul asks and answers four important questions in this section:

*A. Is there any advantage in being a Jew if Jews are condemned? (vv. 1–2)*

The answer is “Yes,” because the Jews were given the oracles of God, His revealed will in His Word. Had Israel believed the Word and obeyed it, the nation would have received Christ and been saved. Then, through them, God would have spread the blessing to the whole world. We today are certainly privileged to have the Word of God. May we never take it for granted.

*B. Has Israel’s unbelief canceled God’s Word? (vv. 3–4)*

Of course not. The unbelief of people could never cancel the faithfulness of God (“faith” in v. 3). God is true though every man is a liar! Here Paul quotes Ps. 51:4, where King David openly admitted his sin and God’s righteousness in judging him. Even in admitting his sins, David declared the righteousness of God and the truth of His Word.

*C. Then, why not sin and glorify God the more? (vv. 5–8)*

“After all, if God is honored in judging my sin, then I am really doing Him a favor by sinning! Instead of judging me, He should let me sin that He might be glorified all the more! He certainly is not righteous to judge me!” Paul quickly disposes of this argument for sin by pointing out in v. 6 that such a position would mean God could never judge the world, and even Abraham recognized God as the “Judge of the world” (Gen. 18:25). Paul does not explain how God judges sin and gets glory from it; he merely states that all truth and justice would collapse if God did what such people claimed. Paul’s Jewish enemies had lied about him and said that he taught this very doctrine: “Let us do evil that good may come” (v. 8). See also 6:1 and 15. This statement is so contrary to all reason and Scripture that Paul dismissed it by saying that “the people who say this deserve condemnation themselves!” (v. 8).



#### *D. Then is the Jew better than the Gentile? (vv. 9–18)*

No, nor is the Gentile any better or worse than the Jew: for both are sinners and stand under the awful condemnation of God. “There is no difference” is the great message of Romans—no difference in sin (3:22–23) or in salvation (10:12–13). God has regarded both Jew and Gentile as under sin that He might, in grace, have mercy upon all (11:32).

Paul now proves that the whole world is guilty by describing the total sinfulness of mankind. In vv. 10–12, he comments on its sinful character and refers to Ps. 14:1–3. In vv. 13–18, he reminds us of its conduct, quoting from Ps. 5:9, 140:3, 10:7, and 36:1, and also Isa. 59:7–8. Please read these verses and their settings carefully. His final verdict is given in vv. 19–20: the whole world is guilty before God! The Law that the Jews thought would save them merely condemns them; for the Law gives the knowledge of sin.

## **II. The Good News: Justification by Faith (3:21–31)**

### *A. Apart from the Law.*

Verse 21 can be paraphrased, “But now, in this age of grace, a righteousness—a new kind of righteousness—has been revealed, but not one that depends on the Law.” People today want righteousness by the Law and by works, but Paul has already proved that the Law condemns and can never save. This grace-righteousness was, however, seen in the OT. Abraham, for example, was declared righteous because of his faith (Gen. 15:6). Habakkuk 2:4 says, “The just shall live by faith.” Read Rom. 9:30–33 and see why Israel missed this righteousness by faith.

### *B. Available through Christ (vv. 22–26).*

Note how often Paul uses the word “faith.” Verse 23 can be read, “For all have sinned [once-for-all in Adam] and are constantly coming short of the glory of God.” Then Paul introduces several important terms:

*Justified*—declared righteous in God’s sight through the merits of Christ, secure in our position in Christ before the throne of God. Justification is God’s righteousness imputed, put to our account. Sanctification is righteousness imparted, or lived out in our daily lives.

*Redemption*—deliverance from sin and its penalties, by the payment of a price. This price was Christ’s blood on the cross.

*Propitiation*—Christ’s sacrifice satisfied God’s holy law, thus making it possible for God to forgive sinners and remain just Himself. God’s justice has been satisfied; He may now look with kindness and grace upon a lost world.

“Justified freely by His grace” (v. 24)! What a thrilling statement! Not by works, good intentions, gifts, or prayers, but freely by His grace alone. It is in this letter that Paul explains how God can be both “just and justifier” (v. 26), and the answer is the cross. When Jesus died, He bore our sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:24) and thus paid the price God’s law demanded. But He arose again! Thus He is alive and able to save all who will believe!

Verse 25 teaches that in the ages before the full revelation of the Gospel of Christ, God appeared to be unjust in “passing over” the sins of mankind and forgiving such people as Noah, Abraham, and Enoch. True, He did send wrath in some cases; but

generations of sinners seemed to escape the judgment of God. How was God able to do this? Because He knew that at the cross, He would give a full display of His wrath against sin, and yet through Christ's death provide a redemption for sins that had merely been "covered" by the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 9–10).

*C. Accepted by faith (vv. 27–31).*

"Hear the conclusion of the whole matter!" The Jew has nothing to boast of, because all sinners are justified by faith and not by the works of the Law. If justification is by the Law, then He is a God of the Jews only, because only Israel had the Law. But God is also the God of the Gentiles. Therefore, both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way—by faith. And this simple means of salvation does not cancel the Law, for the Law demanded death for sin, and Christ died for our sins. Thus, the Gospel establishes the Law. God's Law reveals my need of grace, and God's grace enables me to obey the Law.

## Romans 4

By all means seek to master this chapter! It explains how God justifies (declares righteous) ungodly people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Salvation" is a broad term and includes all that God does for the believer in Christ; "justification" is a legal term describing our perfect standing before God in the righteousness of Christ. In this chapter, Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate three great facts about justification by faith.

### **I. Justification Is by Faith, Not Works (4:1–8)**

Every Jew revered "Father Abraham," and from Gen. 15:6 knew that Abraham had been justified before God. Abraham's acceptance by God was so certain that they referred to heaven as "Abraham's bosom." Knowing this, Paul points to Abraham and asks, "How was Abraham, our father in the flesh, justified?" Was it by works? No, for then he could have gloried in his accomplishment, and we have no record of such action in the OT. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God!" (See Gen. 15:1–6.) The gift of righteousness came, not by works, but by faith in God's revealed Word.

Note that in his argument, Paul used the words "reckon," "impute," and "count" (vv. 3–6, 8–11, 22–24). These words all mean the same thing: to put to a person's account. Justification means righteousness imputed (put to our account) and gives us a right standing before God. Sanctification means righteousness imparted (made a part of our life) and gives us a right standing before men, so they believe we are Christians. Both are a part of salvation, as James 2:14–26 argues. What good is it to say that I have faith in God if my life does not reveal faithfulness to God?

Salvation is either a reward for works or a gift through grace; it cannot be both. Verse 5 states that God justifies the ungodly (not the righteous) through faith and not works. The Jews thought that God justified religious people on the basis of their works; yet Paul has proved that "Father Abraham" was saved simply on the basis of faith. Then

Paul refers to David and quotes Ps. 32:1–2, proving that Israel’s great king taught justification by faith, apart from works. God does not impute sin to our account, because that was charged to Christ’s account (2 Cor. 5:21, and see Phile. 18). Rather, He imputes Christ’s righteousness to our account purely on the basis of grace! What a wonderful salvation we have!

## **II. Justification Is by Grace, Not Law (4:9–17)**

Now the important question arises: “If salvation is by faith, then what about the Law? What about the covenant God made with Abraham?” Paul answers this question by pointing out that Abraham’s faith and salvation took place fourteen years before he was circumcised! Circumcision was the seal of the covenant, the rite that made a Jewish child a part of the system of law. Yet Abraham, the “Father” of the Jews, was in effect a Gentile (that is, uncircumcised) when he was saved! Circumcision was merely an outward sign of a spiritual relationship, as baptism is today. No physical ceremony can produce spiritual changes; yet the Jews of Paul’s day (like many “religious” people today) trusted in the ceremonies—the outward signs—and ignored the saving faith that was required of them. Abraham is actually the “father” of all believers, all who belong to the “household of faith” (see Gal. 3:7, 29). As Paul pointed out in Rom. 2:27–29, not all “Jews” are truly the “Israel of God.”

In vv. 13–17, Paul contrasts law and grace, just as in vv. 1–8 he contrasted faith and works. The key word here is “promise” (vv. 13, 14, 16). God’s promise to Abraham that he would be “the heir of the world” (v. 13—indicating the glorious kingdom ruled over by the Promised Seed, Christ) was not given in connection with the Law or circumcision, but by God’s grace alone. Read Gen. 15 again and note Abraham was “at the end of himself” when God stepped in and gave him His gracious promise. All Abraham had to do was believe God! The Law was never given to save anyone; the Law only brings wrath and reveals sin. The Law completely cancels grace, just as works will cancel faith; the two cannot exist side by side (vv. 14–15). How could Abraham be saved by the Law when the Law had not yet been given? Paul concludes in v. 16 that justification comes by grace, through faith; and thus all people—Jews and Gentiles—can be saved! Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, but he is “the father of us all,” all who follow in his steps of faith. (Read Gal. 3.)

## **III. Justification Is by Resurrection Power, Not Human Effort (4:18–25)**

The first section (vv. 1–8) contrasted faith and works; the second (vv. 9–17) contrasted law and grace; and now the third (vv. 18–25) contrasts life and death. Note that Paul in v. 17 identifies God as “He who quickens the dead.” Abraham and Sarah were “dead,” their bodies being well past the age of child-bearing (see Heb. 11:11–12). How could two people, one ninety years old and the other one hundred, ever hope to have a son? But when the flesh is dead, then the resurrection power of the Spirit can go to work!

We ought to marvel at the faith of Abraham. All he had was the promise of God that he would be the father of many nations; yet he believed this promise, gave the glory to God, and received the blessing. What a perfect illustration of the miracle of salvation. As long as people depend on the flesh and feel they still have enough strength to please

God, they will never be justified. But when we come to the end of ourselves, admit we are dead, and cease to strive in our own efforts, then God is able to “raise us from the dead” and give us new life and a perfect standing before Him. It was Abraham’s simple faith in God’s Word that justified him, and that is how sinners are justified today.

But perhaps Abraham was somebody of importance. No, says v. 24; God wrote that statement in His Word for our sakes, not Abraham’s. We are saved the same way he was saved: by faith. Note how important this word “believe” is in Romans: it appears in 1:16; 3:22, 26; 4:3, 24; 5:1; 10:4, 9–10; etc. When a sinner believes the promise of God in the Word, then the same resurrection power enters his life, and he becomes a Christian, a child of God, as was Abraham. We must confess that we are dead and believe that Christ is alive and will save us.

Verse 25 explains the basis for justification: the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul will go into detail on this subject in chapter 5. The verse reads, “[Jesus our Lord] was delivered because of our offenses, and was raised again on account of our justification.” The fact that He died proves we were sinners; the fact that God raised Him from the dead proves we have been justified by His blood. This is evidence again that justification is a matter of resurrection power and not feeble human effort.

## Romans 5

This chapter is an explanation of the last word in chapter 4, justification. A clear understanding of Paul’s argument is essential if we are to grasp the meaning of justification by faith.

### I. The Blessings of Justification (5:1–11)

Keep in mind that justification is God’s declaration that the believing sinner is righteous in Christ. It is righteousness imputed, put to our account. Sanctification is righteousness imparted, worked out in and through our lives by the Spirit. Justification is our standing before God; sanctification is our state here on earth before others. Justification never changes; sanctification does. Note the blessings we have in justification:

#### A. *We have peace (v. 1).*

There was a time when we were enemies (v. 10); but now in Christ we have peace with God. Peace with God means that our problem with sin has been settled by the blood of Christ. God is our Father, not our Judge.

#### B. *We have access to God (v. 2a).*

Before our salvation, we stood “in Adam” and were condemned; but now in Christ, we have a perfect standing before God and can enter into His presence (Heb. 10:19–25).

#### C. *We have hope (v. 2b).*

Literally, “We boast in the hope of the glory of God.” Read Eph. 2:11–12 and note that the unsaved person is “without hope.” We cannot boast in good works that bring

salvation (Eph. 2:8–9), but we can boast in the wonderful salvation God has given us in Christ.

*D. We have daily confidence (vv. 3–4).*

“We boast [glory] in testings also.” The true Christian not only has a hope for the future, but he has confidence in the present trials of life. The “formula” looks like this: testing plus Christ equals patience; patience plus Christ equals character [experience]; experience plus Christ equals hope. Note that we do not glory over trials, or about trials, but in trials. Compare Matt. 13:21; 1 Thes. 1:4–6; and James 1:3ff.

*E. We experience the love of God (vv. 5–11)*

The Spirit within sheds God’s love to us and through us. God revealed His love at the cross when Christ died for those who were “without strength,” who were “ungodly,” “sinners,” and “enemies,” thus proving His great love. Paul’s argument is this: if God did all that for us while we were His enemies, how much more will He do for us now that we are His children! We are saved by Christ’s death (v. 9), but we are also saved by His life (v. 10) as “the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10) operates in our lives. We have received “reconciliation” (atonement, v. 11), and now the love of God is experienced in our lives.

## **II. The Basis of Justification (5:12–21)**

This is a complex section, so read it over several times and use a modern translation, too. Paul is explaining here how it is that all men are sinners, and how it is that one Man’s death could give an ungodly sinner a right standing before God.

Please note, first of all, the repetition of the word “one” (vv. 12, 15–19—eleven times). Note also the use of the word “reign” in vv. 14, 17, and 21. The key thought here is that when God looks upon the human race, He sees but two men—Adam and Christ. Every human being is either “in Adam” and lost, or “in Christ” and saved; there is no middle ground. Verse 14 states that Adam is a type (figure) of Christ; he is the “First Adam,” and Christ is the “Last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45).

We may contrast the two Adams as follows: (1) The first Adam was made from the earth, but the Last Adam (Christ) came from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). (2) The first Adam was the king of the old creation (Gen. 1:26–27), while the Last Adam is King-Priest over the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). (3) The first Adam was tested in a perfect garden and disobeyed God, while the Last Adam was tested in a terrible wilderness and obeyed God; and in the Garden of Gethsemane, He surrendered His will to God. (4) The disobedience of the first Adam brought sin, condemnation, and death upon the human race, but the obedience of the Last Adam brought righteousness, salvation, and life to all who will believe. (5) Through the first Adam, death and sin reign in this world (vv. 14, 17, 21); but through the Last Adam, grace reigns (v. 21) and believers can “reign in life” (v. 17).

The OT is “the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1–2) and ends with the word “curse.” (Mal. 4:6). The NT is “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ” (Matt. 1:1) and ends with “no more curse” (Rev. 22:3). The paradise of Genesis that Adam lost is restored in Revelation through the cross of Christ.

What Paul is teaching here is the unity of the human race in Adam (see Acts 17:26). When he says in v. 12 that “all have sinned” he means that all of us sinned in Adam when he sinned. We are identified with him as the “head” of the human race, and his sin is our sin, his death is our death. Paul’s argument in vv. 12–14 goes like this: We all know that a man dies if he disobeys God’s law. But there was no law from Adam to Moses, yet men died! We know that Adam died because he disobeyed a divine law; but the generations from Adam to Moses did not have such a law to disobey. Then death must be from another cause, and that cause is Adam’s sin. Because we are born “in Adam,” we inherit his sin and condemnation. But in His grace, God has given a “Last Adam,” a new “Head” who has by His life and death undone all that Adam did in his sin. Paul now presents several contrasts between salvation and sin:

*vv. 15–16—The offense vs. the free gift:* Adam’s offense brought condemnation and death, while the free gift of God’s grace brings justification and life.

*v. 17—Death vs. life:* Death reigned as king because of Adam, but now believers reign in life (right now, not only in the future) through Christ, and have abundant life!

*v. 18—Condemnation vs. justification:* Adam’s sin plunged the human race into condemnation; Christ’s death brings right standing with God. Adam hid from God; in Christ we have free access to God!

*v. 19—Disobedience vs. obedience:* Adam disobeyed God and made us all sinners; Christ obeyed God and, through faith in Him, we are made righteous.

*v. 20—Law vs. grace:* God did not give the Law to save mankind, but rather to reveal sin. But God’s superabounding grace met the demands of the Law when Christ died, and then supplied what the Law could not supply—salvation from sin.

The whole transaction is summarized in v. 20; in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17, being “in Christ”) sin no longer reigns, grace does! Death does not reign, life does! And we reign in life! “Christ ... has made us kings and priests to God” (Rev. 1:5–6, NKJV).

Now, the important question is this: Am I “in Adam” or “in Christ”? If I am “in Adam,” then sin and death reign over my life and I am under condemnation. If I am “in Christ,” then grace reigns and I can reign in life through Christ, and sin no longer has me in its slavery (the theme of chapter 6). In 5:6–11, Paul teaches substitution—Christ died for us on the cross. But in 5:12–21, he goes further and teaches identification—believers are in Christ and can live in victory over sin.

Hallelujah, what a Savior!

## **Introductory Notes to Romans 6–8**

The church today desperately needs to emphasize practical holiness in the life of the believer. Every Christian (if he is truly born again) lives as described in Rom. 5; but so few progress into the Christians described in chapters 6 through 8! It is essential that we understand the meaning of this section on sanctification. Not only should we understand it, but live it.

### **Definition**

To sanctify means simply “to set apart.” It says nothing essentially about the nature of a thing, only its position with reference to God. The tabernacle and its furnishings were

sanctified, set apart for God’s exclusive use. The wood, cloth, metal, and other materials were not of themselves “holy,” but they were set apart to God. In John 17:19 Jesus says that He sanctified Himself. Certainly the holy Son of God had no need to be made “more holy” than He was! What He means is simply that He set Himself apart to serve God and, through His act of salvation, was able to set believers apart to the glory of God.

Sanctification in Scripture is three-fold: (1) positional—the Christian is taken out of the world and seated with Christ (John 17:16); (2) practical—the believer has day-by-day victory over sin and grows in holiness and in likeness to Christ; (3) perfect—“We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1–2).

Unless we keep the message of Rom. 6 separated from that of Rom. 7, we will confuse Paul’s message and lose a great blessing. This chart explains the difference between the message of Rom. 6 and the message of Rom. 7.

| Romans 6   | Romans 7  |
|--|---|
| 1. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?   | 1. How can we do anything but sin when our very nature is so sinful?  |
| 2. Bondage to the body of sin.   | 2. Bondage to the Law.  |
| 3. We are dead to sin.   | 3. We are dead to the Law.  |
| 4. Analogy of a servant and master.  | 4. Analogy of a wife and husband.   |
| 5. The problem of avoiding evil when we have sinful natures.   | 5. The problem of doing good when we have sinful natures.   |
| 6. Problem solved by knowing we have died to sin, reckoning ourselves dead to the Law, and yielding to the Spirit. | 6. Problem solved by knowing we have died to the Law, admitting we cannot please God of ourselves, and yielding to the indwelling Spirit. |

Romans 7 presents a deeper problem than that of chapter 6. Every Christian realizes the problem of chapter 6—that his sinful nature drags him down and tries to enslave him. But not many Christians have entered into the experiences of chapter 7, the humbling realization that we are incapable in ourselves of even doing *anything* good! Many Christians live under the Law: they have a set of rules and regulations that they obey religiously in the energy of the flesh, and they call this “dedicated Christian living.” How far from the real thing! Only when the Holy Spirit directs our lives from within and we obey out of a heart of love is there God-honoring Christian living.

The flesh enjoys being “religious,” trying to obey laws, rules, and codes. The most deceitful thing about the flesh is that it can appear so sanctified, so spiritual, when in reality the flesh is at war with God. Romans 6, then, deals with the flesh as it generates evil; chapter 7 deals with the flesh that through law tries to generate “good.”

Romans 5 is important to this discussion, too, even though in our outline we have placed this chapter under the heading “Salvation.” Note the contrasts:

| Romans 5                 | Romans 6 and 7            |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Christ died for us    | 1. We died with Christ    |
| 2. Substitution          | 2. Identification         |
| 3. Christ died for sins  | 3. Christ died unto sin   |
| 4. He paid sin's penalty | 4. He broke sin's power   |
| 5. Justification         | 5. Sanctification         |
| 6. Righteousness imputed | 6. Righteousness imparted |

*The Flesh:* This phrase does not mean the body as such, but rather the nature of man apart from God's influence and power. Other terms used for the flesh are: the old man, the body of sin, and the self. It is difficult for refined people (even Christians) to admit that in us is no good thing. Everything the Bible says about the flesh is negative, and until believers admit that they cannot control the flesh, change the flesh, cleanse the flesh, or conquer the flesh, they will never enter into the life and liberty of Rom. 6–8. Paul the "preeminent Pharisee" (see Phil. 3) had to admit in Romans 7 that even his flesh was not subject to God's laws! Perhaps he did not commit gross outward acts of sin, but he certainly cherished inward attitudes that were contrary to God's will. The law of God is holy and good, but even a holy law can never control sinful flesh.

This truth comes as a shock even to well-taught believers: the Christian life is not lived in the energy of the flesh, attempting to "do good works" for God. No believer on earth can ever do anything in the flesh that can please God. We must admit that "the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63, NKJV) and surrender to the Spirit before we can hear God say of our lives, "I am well pleased." What a tragedy to live under the bondage of laws, resolutions, and rules, when we have been called into glorious liberty through the Spirit!

*Our Responsibility:* Christian living is not a passive thing, in which we merely "die" and let God do everything for us. The three key words of chapter 6 are know, reckon and yield. We must *know* our spiritual position and privileges in Christ, and this means spending time with the Word of God. We must *reckon* that what God says about us in the Bible is true in our lives, and this means showing a faith that is born of the Spirit. Finally, we must *yield* all to the Spirit, not just occasionally, but all day long. This is "walking in the Spirit."

The old nature is strong to do evil, and yet "the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41) when it comes to doing anything spiritual. We must feed the new nature on the milk, meat, bread, and honey of the Word of God, and we must reckon ourselves to be dead to sin. Why feed a corpse? Yet many Christians feed the old nature on the husks of the world while the new nature starves for the manna from God and for fellowship with God in prayer. God has already done His part; our responsibilities are clear: know, reckon, yield.



# Romans 6

We move now into the third section of Romans—"Sanctification" (chaps. 6–8). These three chapters belong together and should not be studied independently, so it would be wise for you to read all three chapters carefully. Note that chapter 6 deals with the believer being dead to sin; chapter 7, with the believer being dead to the Law; and chapter 8, with the believer alive in Spirit-given victory. All three chapters are an explanation of the little phrase in 5:17—"reign in life." Chapter 6 tells us how sin no longer reigns over us (6:12); chapter 7 explains how the Law no longer reigns over us (7:1); and chapter 8 explains how the indwelling Spirit gives us life and liberty (8:2–4).

The believer faces two problems: (1) How can I achieve victory over the old nature (the flesh, the body of sin)? and (2) how can I live so as to please God? Chapter 6 answers the first question: we get victory over the old nature by realizing that we have been crucified with Christ. But the second question is more complex; for how can I please God when everything I do—even the "good things"—is tainted by the old nature? Sin is not simply an outward action; it also involves inward attitudes and dispositions. Chapter 7 answers this problem (along with chapter 8) by showing that the Christian is dead to the Law and that the Spirit fulfills the righteousness of the Law in us (8:4).

The secret of victory over the flesh is found in our obeying those three instructions: Know, reckon, and yield.

## I. Know (6:1–10)

Notice how often Paul uses the word "know" in this chapter (vv. 3, 6, 9, 16). Satan wants to keep us in the dark when it comes to the spiritual truths we should know, and this is why many Christians are living beneath their privileged station. "If God's grace abounds where sin is (5:20)," a person might say, "then the Christian ought to live in sin to know more of God's grace!" Paul shows, however, that this is impossible because the true Christian is dead to sin. This is the wonderful truth of our identification with Christ. Not only did Christ die for us, but we died with Him. When the Spirit baptized us into the body of Christ, then we were buried with Him and raised to newness of life.

Verses 3–4 do not refer to water baptism but the operation of the Spirit in putting us "into Christ" as members of His body. (This operation is illustrated by water baptism.) When Christ died, we died with Him; when He was raised, we were raised to newness of life with Him. This is our new position in Christ. Christ not only died for sin, but He also died unto sin (6:10). That is, He broke the power of sin and put out of commission (destroyed) the old nature (6:6). The old nature is still there, this we know; but it has been robbed of its power by the cross of Christ, for we died with Christ to all that belongs to the old life.

Sin and the old nature are hard masters. The unsaved person is a slave of sin (Eph. 2:1–3), but even many Christians still serve sin even though their slavery to sin has been broken by Christ. People read Rom. 5, discover that Christ died for their sins, and receive Him into their hearts; but they fail to take up the words of Rom. 6 and discover the glorious liberty they have in Christ. Read 6:1–10 again and see for yourself that the believer is dead to sin (v. 2); the old nature has been crucified (v. 6); the believer is freed

from sin (v. 7). The old nature can no longer reign as king over the Christian who knows the truth, reckons on it, and yields to the Lord.

## **II. Reckon (6:11)**

It is not enough merely to know our new position in Christ; we must, by faith, reckon it to be true in our own individual lives. Reckoning is simply that step of faith that says, “What God says about me in the Bible is now true in my life. I am crucified with Christ.” Reckoning is faith in action, resting on the Word of God in spite of circumstances or feelings. God does not tell us to crucify ourselves, but rather to believe that we have been crucified and that “the old man” has been put to death. Crucifixion is one death you cannot inflict on yourself; you must be crucified by another. Reckoning is that step of faith that believes God’s Word and acts upon it.

## **III. Yield (6:12–23)**

If believers truly reckon themselves dead to sin, then they will prove their faith by yielding themselves to God. This is step three in the process of getting victory over the old nature, the flesh. Notice that stern “Let not!” in v. 12. This yielding is an act of our own wills, a step of obedience to the Lord. It is not enough to know this wonderful doctrine, or even reckon on it; we must take this final step of yielding the members of our bodies to Christ.

In vv. 16–23, Paul gives the example of master and servant. No man can serve two masters. Before we were saved, we yielded ourselves to sin, and were the servants of sin. Consequently we received the “wages” of sin—death (v. 23). But now that we have received Christ as Savior, we have been made free from sin; that is, our new position in Christ gives us a new Master as well as a new nature. We are now the servants of righteousness instead of the servants of sin! As we yield the members of the body to Christ as his “tools” or “weapons” (“instruments,” v. 13), then He comes to control our lives, and we bear fruit unto holiness (v. 22).

The Christian who deliberately yields himself to sin will commit sin and reap sorrow. Why should sin be our master when we have died to sin? Why must we be obedient to a master that has already been defeated by Christ? Christians who deliberately sin are people who have yielded themselves to the old nature instead of to the Holy Spirit. They are living beneath their exalted position in Christ. They are living like slaves when they could be reigning like kings.

It is important that we keep these three steps in order. We cannot yield to God and get victory over the flesh unless we first reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin and alive in Christ. But we cannot reckon ourselves dead unless we know our position in Christ. Satan does not want us to live up to our high position in Jesus Christ, so he tries to confuse us about our victory in the Son of God. It is not enough to know that Christ died for us; we must also know that we died in Christ. It is not enough to know that we have new natures within; we must also know that the old nature was dealt with on the cross. Know—reckon—yield: these three steps lead to daily victory over the flesh. These three steps lead to the throne where Christ is exalted on high, and where (with Him) we “reign

in life,” servants of righteousness and not slaves of sin. We enjoy life and true freedom in Him.

Keep in mind that these three steps should represent a daily attitude of life. They are not “emergency measures” that are to be used when we face some special temptation. Believers who spend time with the Word of God daily will know their position in Christ. They will have the faith to reckon themselves dead to sin and will be able to yield themselves to the indwelling Spirit, obtaining victory. The answer to the problem of sin is not simply determination, discipline, reformation, legislation, or any other human endeavor. Victory comes through crucifixion and resurrection.

## Romans 7

This chapter is a greatly misunderstood, but nevertheless important one. Many students cannot understand why Paul deals with victory in chapter 6 and then discusses defeat in chapter 7! They feel that he should move immediately from the victory of chapter 6 to the great blessings of chapter 8, but the inspired writer knew better. Chapter 7 deals with a vital issue in Christian living: the believer’s relationship to God’s law. Romans 6 explains that believers are dead to sin because they are identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. It answers the question, “Shall we continue in sin?” (6:1). But note that Paul asks a second question in 6:15: “Shall we continue in sin because we are not under the Law?” He answers this question in chapter 7 and explains that believers are dead to the Law just as they are dead to sin (7:4).

What does Paul mean in 6:14 when he says we are not “under law but under grace”? To be “under law” means that we must do something for God; to be “under grace” means that God does something for us. Too many Christians are burdened with religious rules and regulations and good resolutions, not realizing that it is impossible to find holiness through their own efforts. How tragic it is to see Christians living “under law,” striving in their own efforts to please God, when the new position they have in Christ and the new power in the Spirit (8:3–4) make it possible for them to enjoy victory and blessing by grace. Paul explains this in chapter 7 by giving us a series of “duets.”

### I. Two Husbands (7:1–6)

The marriage relationship illustrates our relation to the Law. (Keep in mind that when Paul speaks of “the Law” he means not only the law of Moses but any kind of legislation that the believer uses to try to curb sin or attain holiness.) The two husbands are the Law and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When a woman is married to a man, she is bound to that man until he dies. Then she is free to marry again. Before we met Christ, we were bound by the Law and condemned by it. The Law, however, did not “die” when we were saved; instead, we died in Christ. We are no longer “married” to a system of regulations; we are “married” to Jesus Christ, and the Law has no control over us. Read v. 4 again and again and absorb its wonderful message. Our old “husband” has no control over us: we are in a

wonderful new relationship through and in Christ. When we were lost, the Law triggered the “arousings of sin” in our old nature, and this produced death (v. 5). But now we are delivered from the Law and can serve Christ in newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter (v. 6).

Verse 6 does not suggest that Christians have no obligation to obey God. Actually, our obligations are now greater since we know Christ and belong to God’s family. The demands now are far more severe than under the Mosaic law. For example, the Sermon on the Mount goes beyond outward actions to deal with inward attitudes. The law of Moses found murderers guilty, but Jesus said that hatred is equivalent to murder. But Rom. 7:6 teaches that our motivation for obeying is different: we do not mechanically obey a set of rules, but we lovingly, from the heart, obey the Spirit of God who fulfills the righteousness of the Law in us (8:4). A beginning pianist can play a number “letter perfect” and still not capture the inner spirit of the song the way an accomplished musician can. Our obedience to God is not that of a slave fearing a master, but that of a bride lovingly pleasing her bridegroom.

## **II. Two Discoveries (7:7–14)**

Then why did God give the Law if it does not produce holiness? What purposes did God have in mind? Well, Paul made two discoveries that answer this question: (1) the Law itself is spiritual, but (2) the believer is carnal, sold under sin. What a humiliating discovery it was to that proud Pharisee that his very nature was unspiritual and unable to obey the law of God! The Law reveals sin (v. 7), for when we read the Law, the very things it condemns appear in our lives. The Law energizes sin (v. 8), and sin agitates in our nature. The Law slays the sinner and deceives him (vv. 9–11), making him realize that he is too weak to meet God’s standard. Finally, the Law reveals the sinfulness of sin (v. 13), not just our outward actions, but especially our sinful attitudes. The reason the believer cannot make himself holy by means of law is not because God’s law is not holy and good, but because our nature is so sinful that it cannot be changed or controlled by law. It is a wonderful day in the life of the Christian when he or she discovers that “the old nature knows no law and the new nature needs no law.”

## **III. Two Principles (7:15–25)**

After his defeating experience with the Law, Paul concluded that there are two principles (or “laws”) that operate in the life of the believer: (1) the law of sin and death, and (2) the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (see 8:2). He is dealing, then, with the presence of two natures in the child of God. Salvation does not mean that God changes the old nature, cleanses it, or reforms it. The believer’s old nature is just as wicked and opposed to the Spirit today as the day he was saved! Salvation means that God gives the believer a new nature and crucifies the old one. The Christian still has the ability to sin, but he now has an appetite for holiness. The dynamic for sin is still there, but not the desire.

The law of sin and death is simply the operation of the old nature, so that when the believer wants to do good, evil is present. Even the “good things” we do are tainted with evil! (See v. 21.) It is here that you see the difference between the victory of chapter 6 and that of chapter 7: in chapter 6, the believer gains victory over the evil things of the

flesh, that is, he ceases to do evil deliberately; but in chapter 7 he triumphs over the “good things” the flesh would do in obedience to law. But God will not accept the flesh, for in our flesh there is no good thing. “The flesh profits nothing!” (John 6:63, NKJV). Yet how many Christians set up laws for their lives and seek to discipline the flesh into obedience, when God plainly says, “The carnal mind [old nature] is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (8:7).

The law of sin and death is counteracted by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is not by submitting to outward laws that we grow in holiness and serve God acceptably, but by surrendering to the indwelling Spirit of God. This law (or principle) is elaborated in chapter 8, especially in the first seventeen verses. We cannot fulfill the righteousness of the Law by our own strength; the Spirit fulfills it in us by His power (8:3–4).

What is the practical application of all this? Simply this: In our new position before God, as dead to the Law, we are not expected to obey God in our own strength. God has not enslaved us under a “Christian Law” that we must obey in order to be holy. Rather, He has given us His Holy Spirit who enables us to fulfill the demands of God’s holiness. Christians may have the victory of chapter 6 and no longer be enslaved to the body of flesh, but there is more to the Christian life. Shouldn’t we produce fruit for God? Certainly! But the minute we start doing works in our own strength, we discover that we are failures; and, sad to say, many well-meaning Christians stop right there and become spiritual casualties. Rather, we should accept the truths of Rom. 7—that we are indeed failures in ourselves, that the Law is good but we are carnal, and then allow the Spirit to work out God’s will in our life. May God enable us to reckon ourselves dead to sin (chap. 6), and dead to the Law (chap. 7) that we might, through the Spirit, enjoy the blessed liberty of God’s children and glorify God in holy living.

## Romans 8

This chapter is the climax of the section on “Sanctification” (chaps. 6–8) and supplies the answers to the questions raised about the Law and the flesh. The Holy Spirit dominates the entire chapter, for it is through the indwelling Spirit that we overcome the flesh and live a fruitful Christian life. The chapter can be summarized in three phrases: no condemnation, no obligation, and no separation.

### **I. No Condemnation: The Spirit and the Law (8:1–4)**

These verses actually form the conclusion to the argument in chapter 7. Keep in mind that Paul is not dealing with salvation in chapter 7 but with the problem of how the believer can ever do anything good when he has such a sinful nature. How can a holy God ever accept anything we do when we have “no good thing” dwelling in us? It would seem that He would have to condemn every thought and deed! But there is “no condemnation” since the indwelling Holy Spirit fulfills the righteousness of the Law in us. The Law cannot condemn us because we are dead to the Law. God cannot condemn

us, for the Holy Spirit enables the believer to “walk in the Spirit” and thereby meet God’s holy demands.

It is a glorious day in the life of the Christian when he or she realizes that God’s children are not under the Law, that God does not expect them to do “good works” in the power of the old nature. When the Christian understands that “there is no condemnation,” then he realizes that the indwelling Spirit pleases God and helps the believer to please Him. What a glorious salvation we have! “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage!” warns Paul in Gal. 5:1 (NKJV).

## **II. No Obligation: The Spirit and the Flesh (8:5–17)**

The believer can have two “dispositions” (minds): he can lean toward the things of the flesh and be a carnal Christian (“carnal” means “of the flesh”) who is at enmity with God; or he can incline toward the things of the Spirit, be a spiritual Christian, and enjoy life and peace. The carnal mind cannot please God; only the Spirit working in and through us can please God.

The Christian has no obligation to the flesh: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (v. 12). Our obligation is to the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who convicted us and showed us our need of the Savior. It was the Spirit who imparted saving faith, who implanted the new nature within us, and who daily witnesses within that we are God’s children. What a great debt we owe to the Spirit! Christ loved us so much, He died for us; the Spirit loves us so much, He lives in us. Daily He endures our carnality and selfishness; daily He is grieved by our sin; yet He loves us and remains in us as the seal of God and the “down payment” (“earnest,” 2 Cor. 1:22) of the blessings waiting for us in eternity. If a person does not have the Spirit dwelling within, that person is not a child of God.

The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of adoption” (v. 15). To live in the flesh or under law (and to put yourself under law is to move toward living in the flesh) leads to bondage; but the Spirit leads us into a glorious life of liberty in Christ. Liberty to the believer never means freedom to do as he or she pleases, for that is the worst kind of slavery! Rather, Christian liberty in the Spirit is freedom from law and the flesh so that we can please God and become what He wants us to become. “Adoption” in the NT does not mean what it typically means today, the taking of a child into a family to be a legal member of the family. The literal meaning of the Gk. word is “son-placing”—the taking of a minor (whether in the family or outside) and making him or her the rightful heir. Every believer is a child of God by birth and an heir of God through adoption. In fact, we are joint-heirs with Christ, so that He cannot receive His inheritance in glory until we are there to share it with Him. Thank God, the believer has no obligation to the flesh, to feed it, pamper it, obey it. Instead, we must “put to death” (mortify) the deeds of the flesh by the power of the Spirit (v. 13, see Col. 3:9ff) and allow the Spirit to direct our daily lives.

### III. No Separation: The Spirit and Suffering (8:18–39)

Though believers endure suffering now, they will enjoy glory when Christ returns. In fact, the whole creation (“creature” in vv. 19–21) is groaning under the bondage of sin, thanks to Adam’s disobedience. When Christ finally imprisons Satan, He will deliver the entire creation from this bondage, and all nature will enjoy with us “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (v. 21). What a thrilling salvation we have: free from the penalty of sin because Christ died for us (chap. 5); free from the power of sin because we died with Christ to the flesh (chap. 6) and to the Law (chap. 7); and someday we shall be free from the very presence of sin when nature is delivered from bondage.

We have the Spirit of adoption, but we are “waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body” (v. 23). The soul has been redeemed, but not the body. We wait in hope, however, because the indwelling Spirit is given as “the firstfruits” of the deliverance God has for us in the future. Even if we die, the Spirit who has sealed us unto the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13–14) will raise our body to life (v. 11).

Note the three “groans” in vv. 22–26: (1) all creation groans, v. 22; (2) the believer groans awaiting Christ’s coming, v. 23; and (3) the indwelling Spirit groans as He intercedes for us, v. 26. Note John 11 where Jesus “groaned within Himself” as He visited the grave of Lazarus. How the heart of God is burdened because of the bondage of creation. What a price Christ paid to deliver us.

Paul points out that while we endure this suffering in hope we have the privilege of praying in the Spirit. Perhaps too much of our praying is of the flesh—long, beautiful, “pious” prayers that glorify man and nauseate God (Isa. 1:11–18). Paul indicates that the most spiritual prayer could be a wordless groan that comes from the heart! “Sighs too deep for words” is the way one translation renders v. 26. The Spirit makes intercession for us, the Father searches our hearts and knows what the Spirit desires, and this He grants to us. The Spirit always prays in the will of God. What is the will of God? That believers might be conformed to the image of Christ (v. 29). We can claim the promise of v. 28 because of the purpose of v. 29. Note that all the verbs in v. 30 are past tense: the believer has been called, justified, and glorified. Why faint under the sufferings of this world when we have already been glorified? We simply wait for the revelation of this glory at the return of Christ.

Paul closes by asking five questions (vv. 32–35) and answering them clearly. There is no need to fret over what God will do, for God is for us and not against us. The proof is that He gave His very best on the cross. Surely He will freely give us anything else we need. Can anyone indict us for sin? No! We have been justified, and that standing before God never changes. Can anyone condemn us? No! Christ died for us and lives now as our Advocate (lawyer) at God’s right hand. Can anything separate us from God’s love? No! Not even the devil himself (“principalities and powers”—v. 38).

No condemnation—no obligation—no separation! “Yet, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (NKJV).

# Romans 9

The next three chapters deal with Israel's spiritual history: past (chap. 9), present (chap. 10), and future (chap. 11). Paul's purpose is to explain how God could set aside His chosen people and save the Gentiles, and how He will restore the nation at some future date.

## I. Israel's Election Described (9:1–13)

### A. *The blessings of the election (vv. 1–5).*

We cannot help but admire Paul's burden for Israel. His words remind us of Moses in Ex. 32:31–32. Do we have that kind of a burden for lost souls? Christ loved us so much He became a curse for us.

(1) The adoption—chosen by God because of His love (see Isa. 43:20–21).

(2) The glory—the presence of God in the tabernacle (Ex. 24:16–17).

(3) The covenants—through Abraham, Moses and David, God gave unchanging covenants to His people Israel.

(4) The giving of the Law—God never so dealt with the Gentiles. Israel heard God's voice and received His laws to govern their lives.

(5) The service of God—the priestly service in the tabernacle was a privilege from the Lord.

(6) The promises—many OT promises have been fulfilled, and many are yet to be fulfilled for the Jews.

(7) The fathers—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob formed the foundation for the nation.

(8) The Messiah—Christ was a Jew, of the tribe of Judah, born according to the Law. Note in v. 5 that Paul calls Christ "God blessed forever."

No other nation had these wonderful blessings; yet Israel took them for granted and ultimately rejected the righteousness of God. The Christian today also belongs to God's elect and has similar blessings to enjoy: adoption (Eph. 1:5); glory (Eph. 1:6–7); the new covenant in Christ's blood (Heb. 9–10); the law written on the heart (2 Cor. 3; Heb. 10:16–17); priestly service through Christ (1 Peter 2:5); and we have Abraham as the father of the believing (Gal. 3:7)—all because we have Christ.

### B. *The basis of the election (vv. 6–13).*

In election, God exercises His sovereign will to accomplish His perfect plan. Keep in mind that the election discussed in Rom. 9–11 is national and not individual. To apply all the truths of these chapters to the salvation or security of the individual believer is to miss their message completely. In fact, Paul carefully points out that he is discussing the Jews and Gentiles as peoples, not individual sinners.

(1) Abraham—He was chosen as the father of the Hebrew nation, but Paul states that not all Israelites are true sons of Israel. (See also 2:25–29.) Abraham had many children (Gen. 25:1–6), but only one chosen son, Isaac, who was the child of promise by faith.



(2) Isaac—He was the child of promise by faith (see Gal. 4:21–31), while Ishmael was a child of the flesh through works. The true “seed of Abraham” are the believers, and not just all who have Jewish blood in their veins.

(3) Jacob—God bypassed Esau, the firstborn, and chose Jacob, and this choice was made even before the children were born. Why? To show that God’s purpose in electing His nation would be fulfilled. Esau made the choice to rebel against God, but God’s purpose does not depend on man’s decisions. We cannot explain the relationship between man’s choice and God’s purpose, but we know that both are true and are taught in the Word.

## **II. Israel’s Election Defended (9:14–33)**

The doctrine of Israel’s national election raises several crucial theological questions:

### *A. Is God unrighteous? (vv. 14–18)*

Of course not! For election has nothing to do with justice, but rather free grace. “God is unjust if He chooses one and leaves another!” ignorant people often say. But the purpose of God goes beyond justice; for if God did only what was just, He would have to condemn all of us! Paul uses Moses (Ex. 33:19) and Pharaoh (Ex. 9:16) as proof that God can do what He wishes in dispensing His grace and mercy. Nobody deserves God’s mercy, and nobody can condemn God for His choice of Israel or His bypassing of other nations.

### *B. Why does God find fault if none can resist His will? (vv. 19–29)*

Paul replies with a parable about the potter, possibly borrowed from Jer. 18:1–6. God is the Potter, and the nations of the world (and their leaders) are the vessels. Some are vessels of wrath that God patiently endures until their time of destruction (Gen. 15:16). Others are vessels of mercy that reveal His glory. Paul then quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 to show that God promised to call a “people” from among the Gentiles, a people to be called “children of the living God.” This is the church (see 1 Peter 2:9–10). He also quotes Isa. 10:22–23, showing that a remnant of Jews would also be saved (see Isa. 1:9). In other words, God’s purpose in election makes it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to be saved by grace. Neither Jew nor Gentile could be saved any way other than by the grace of God.

### *C. What shall we say about the Gentiles? (vv. 30–33)*

Here is the paradox of history: the Jews tried to be righteous and were rejected; the Gentiles, who did not have the privileges the Jews had, were received! The reason is because the Jews tried to attain righteousness by works, while the Gentiles received righteousness by faith through the grace of God. The Jews stumbled over a crucified Messiah (see Isa. 8:14; 28:16; Matt. 21:42; 1 Cor. 1:23; and 1 Peter 2:6–8). They wanted a Messiah who would lead the nation to political freedom and glory; they could not believe in a crucified Christ.

Paul’s purpose in this chapter is to explain Israel’s position in the plan of God. Israel was an elect nation, given privileges that no other nation had; yet it failed miserably to follow God’s program of blessing for the world. The entire chapter exalts the sovereign grace of God without minimizing the responsibility of men and women for making right

decisions. God's Word will prevail regardless of human disobedience; but disobedient sinners will miss the blessing. No human mind can fathom or explain the wisdom of God (see 11:33–36), but this we know: without the sovereign grace of God, there would be no salvation.

## Romans 10

In this chapter, Paul explains why Israel is in its present spiritual condition nationally.

### I. The Reason for the Rejection (10:1–13)

The key word in this chapter is “righteousness.” The Jews wanted righteousness, but tried to obtain it in the wrong way. Like the Pharisees described in Matt. 23:15, the Jews expended energy in securing a right standing with God, but their deeds were done in ignorance. “Religious people” today are no different; they think that God will accept them for their good works.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of righteousness: “works righteousness,” which comes from obeying law; and “faith righteousness,” which is the gift of God to those who trust His Son. The Jews would not submit to faith righteousness; their racial and religious pride turned them from simple faith to blind religion. They rejected Christ and clung to the Law, not realizing that Christ was the very one for whom the Law had been preparing the way, and that He Himself had ended on the cross the reign of the Law. The Mosaic law is no longer God's basis for dealing with mankind; He deals with us at the cross, where Christ died for the world. Righteousness by the Law is described in Lev. 18:5; faith righteousness is described in Deut. 30:12–14.

The Deuteronomy passage is used to show that the Word of God is readily available to the sinner, and that Christ is near him and ready to save. Verses 6–8 are a good illustration of Paul's use of OT passages that convey NT truth. In Deut. 30:11–14, Moses warned the people against disobedience to the Word of God. Lest they argue that the Law was far from them (applying especially to the time when Israel would be scattered among the nations, Deut. 30:1–5), Moses reminded them that they did not have to go to heaven, or across the sea, to find God's Word: it was on their lips and in their hearts. Paul applied this to Christ, the Word (John 1:1), and pointed out that Israel need not bring Christ down from heaven, or up from the underworld, because the Word of salvation is near to them so that they can believe and be saved. Salvation comes when sinners confess that “Jesus is Lord [Almighty God]” and believe in their hearts that Christ is alive from the dead. What is believed in the heart is confessed openly with the mouth. Some of the Jews in Jesus' day would not openly confess Him (John 12:42–43). When the sinner receives Christ by faith and confesses Him openly, thus proving his faith, he receives the gift of righteousness.

In v. 11, Paul again quotes Isa. 28:16 (see Rom. 9:33): “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame (NKJV).” The Jews disliked that word “whoever” since they

thought they were the only “chosen people.” But in v. 13 Paul cites Joel 2:32 to prove that whoever calls upon Christ is saved—and not the Jew only!

## **II. The Remedy for the Rejection (10:14–17)**

The sequence here is as follows: (1) messengers are sent; (2) they declare the Word; (3) sinners hear the Word; (4) sinners believe the Word; (5) they call upon Christ; (6) they are saved! The argument here is simply that sinners cannot be saved apart from the Word of God, for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (v. 17, NKJV). In v. 15, Paul refers to Isa. 52:7, a verse that will have its complete fulfillment in the day when Israel is established in its kingdom. Think of the joy Israel will have when the news comes that its Messiah is reigning! Paul applies this passage to the taking of the Gospel of peace (peace with God and peace between Jew and Gentile, Eph. 2:13–17) to lost Israel today. We often use Rom. 10:14–15 as the basis for our sending missionaries to Gentile nations, and certainly this application is valid; but the basic meaning here is that of taking the Gospel to Israel today. We take the Gospel to the Jew, not because of Rom. 1:16 (“to the Jew first”), but because of Rom. 10:14–15. If we share Paul’s burden for the people of Israel, we will want to share the Gospel with them. The witness who bears the Gospel to the lost (whether Gentile or Jew) certainly has “beautiful feet” in the eyes of God.

What is Israel’s attitude today? That of Isa. 53:1—“Who has believed?” (NKJV) Just as Israel turned away in unbelief in Christ’s day (John 12:37–38) and during the time of witness of the apostles in Acts 1–7, so the nation today is settled in unbelief. Paul quotes Ps. 19:4 in v. 18 to show that the Word of God, even through nature, has reached around the world; Israel is without excuse.

## **III. The Result of the Rejection (10:18–21)**

The result of Israel’s rejection is that God has turned to the Gentiles and is now taking out of them a people for His name (see Acts 15). But even this should be no surprise to the Jews, for in Deut. 32:21, God promised to use other nations to provoke the Jews to jealousy, and in Isa. 65:1–2, He announced that Israel would be disobedient, but that the Gentiles would find Him and His salvation.

Keep in mind that the OT did promise the salvation of the Gentiles; but nowhere did it teach that Jews and Gentiles would be part of the same plan or that believers from both races would be one in Christ. The OT program provided that the Gentiles would be saved through Israel’s rise, that is, its establishment as a kingdom. But Israel fell! What then would God do with the Gentiles? Paul points out in Rom. 9–11 that through Israel’s fall, mercy was extended to the Gentiles (see 11:11). God has committed all people, Jews and Gentiles, to unbelief; in this way He can have mercy upon all through the grace made possible at Calvary (11:32).

Verse 21 certainly states God’s attitude toward Israel, even today. Though the nation is set aside in blindness and unbelief (2 Cor. 3:15–4:6; Rom. 11:25), God yearns after the unsaved Jew just as He does the lost Gentile. No doubt many Jews who are hearing the Word today will trust Christ after the church has been caught up and the Tribulation period begins. Instead of criticizing the Jews for their spiritual blindness, we ought to

thank God that they gave us the Bible and Savior, and that even through their fall, salvation was made available to Gentiles!

Before we leave this chapter, note several practical points:

(1) Salvation is not difficult: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!” (v. 11).

(2) It is important that the Word of God be presented to lost sinners. It is the Word that convicts, that gives faith, that leads to Christ.

(3) There are only two “religions” in the world: works-righteousness and faith-righteousness. Nobody can fulfill the first, but everybody can respond to the second.

## Romans 11

This chapter discusses Israel’s future and answers the question, “Has God permanently cast aside His people, or is there a future for Israel?” Paul says the answer is “Yes!”, and presents several proofs.

### I. The Personal Proof (11:1)

“I am an Israelite!” states Paul, “and my salvation is proof that God is not through with Israel.” In 1 Tim. 1:16 Paul states that his conversion (told three times in Acts) was to be a pattern for other Jewish believers. Certainly it is not a pattern for the conversion of a Gentile today, for no lost sinner sees the glorified Christ, hears Him speak, and is blinded for three days! But Paul’s experience is a picture of the way Israel’s people will be converted at the coming of Christ in glory. Like Paul, they will be in rebellion and unbelief. They will see Him whom they pierced (Zech. 12:10 and Rev. 1:7) and will repent and be saved. In 1 Cor. 15:8, Paul says he was “born out of due time”; that is, as a Jew, he saw Christ and was saved long before his people would have that same experience.

### II. The Historical Proof (11:2–10)

Paul reached back into 1 Kings to show that God has always had a faithful remnant even in the times of greatest unbelief. In fact, as we read OT history, we cannot help but be impressed with the fact that it was always the remnant that God used and blessed. See Isa. 1:9, for example. It is a basic teaching of the Word that the majority falls from the faith and cannot be reformed, so God must take the remnant and begin over again. Verse 5 states that God has a remnant according to grace, that is, in the body, which is the church. Though not many, there are Jews in the body, although, of course, all national distinctions are removed in Christ. But if God is saving Jews during this age of the church when Israel is blind, how much more will He do in that coming age when Israel moves back on the scene again? God has never forsaken His people; this is the testimony of history.

We need to remind ourselves that during this church age, God is not dealing with the nation of Israel as such. According to Eph. 2:14–17 and Gal. 3:28, we are all one in Christ. No Jewish group can claim to be God’s elect remnant. In vv. 8–10, Paul shows that this “blinding” of Israel as a nation was prophesied in Isa. 29:10 and Deut. 29:4. (Compare Matt. 13:14–15 and Isa. 6:9–10.) In vv. 9–10 he refers to Ps. 69:22, where God promises to turn Israel’s blessings into curses because it had refused His Word.

### **III. The Dispensational Proof (11:11–24)**

Paul in these verses is discussing Jews and Gentiles, not individual sinners or saints. In this section he proves that God has a dispensational purpose behind the fall of Israel; namely, the salvation of the Gentiles. Through Israel’s fall, God was able to commit all people to disobedience and thus have mercy upon all! Gentiles do not have to become Jews before they can become Christians.

Paul argues that if the fall of the Jews has brought such blessing to the world, then how much greater will the blessing be when Israel is again restored! The restoration of Israel will bring resurrection to the world (v. 15). In other words, Paul was certain that there was a future for Israel as a nation. The teaching that the church today is God’s Israel, and that the OT kingdom promises are now fulfilled in the church in a “spiritual way” is not scriptural. Paul looked forward to the day when Israel would be received into fullness of blessing as a nation.

The parable of the olive tree must be examined carefully. Paul is not talking about salvation of individual Christians, but the position of Jews and Gentiles as peoples in the program of God. Israel is the olive tree that failed to bear fruit for God. God then broke off some of the branches and grafted into the tree the Gentiles, “a wild olive tree.” This was done “contrary to nature” (v. 24), for it is the practice to graft the good branch into the poorer stock; but God grafted the weak Gentiles into the good stock of Israel’s religious privileges! This act shows the goodness and the severity of God: His goodness in saving the Gentiles, His severity in cutting off rebellious Israel. But the Gentiles dare not boast because they now have Israel’s place of spiritual privilege, for God can cut them off too! And He will do just that at the end of this age, when the Gentile nations join together in a world coalition that refuses the Word of God and the Son of God. Then He will call out the true church, judge the Gentile nations, purge Israel, and set up His promised kingdom for Israel.

Again, remember that the theme of chapter 11 is national and not personal. God will never “break off” true believers from their salvation, for there is no separation between Christ and His people (Rom. 8:35–39). The church today is primarily made up of Gentiles, and we Gentiles benefit from the spiritual heritage of Israel (the rich sap of the olive tree). In a spiritual sense, we are children of Abraham, who is the “father” of all who believe (Gal. 3:26–29).

### **IV. The Scriptural Proof (11:25–36)**

Paul has used the OT often in these three chapters, but in this section, he turns to Isa. 59:20–21, Isa. 27:9, and Ps. 14:7 to show that the OT promised a coming Deliverer who would cleanse and restore Israel. He states the “mystery” of Israel’s blindness, a

mystery being a truth hidden in past ages but now revealed in its fullness in the NT. “The fullness of the Gentiles” (v. 25) refers to the number of Gentiles that will be saved during this church age. When the body of Christ is completed, He will catch it away in the air; then will begin the seven-year Tribulation here on earth, “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). At the end of that period, the Deliverer will come, and the believing remnant will enter into its kingdom. “All Israel” does not mean every last Jew; rather, it means that the nation of Israel at that day will all be saved; it will be a redeemed, regenerated nation. God’s promised covenant is quoted (Jer. 31:31–34) in v. 27. This “new covenant” will apply to Israel when it trusts Christ as its Redeemer and turns from its sins. Though the Jews may seem like enemies of God’s will today, they are still beloved in God’s sight because of the covenants He made with their fathers. Men may change, but God cannot change or revoke His promises (v. 29).

In the final paragraph (vv. 30–32), Paul explains that the Gentiles at one time rejected God (Rom. 1:18ff), yet now were being saved by faith; so today the Jews are in unbelief, but shall one day receive mercy. God had committed both Jews and Gentiles to unbelief and sin, that He might be able to save both through grace (v. 32).

After reviewing God’s gracious and wise plan for both Jews and Gentiles, is it any wonder Paul broke out in a hymn of praise to the Lord (vv. 33–36)!

## Romans 12

This chapter begins the final section of Romans—“Service” (12–16). Paul tells us how to put our learning into practice; and in this chapter, the apostle gives us four pictures of the Christian and reminds us of our spiritual duties.

### I. A Sacrifice on the Altar (12:1–2)

True Christian service and living must begin with personal dedication to the Lord. The Christian who fails in life is the one who has first failed at the altar, refusing to surrender completely to Christ. King Saul failed at the altar (1 Sam. 13:8ff and 15:10ff), and it cost him his kingdom.

The motive for dedication is love; Paul does not say, “I command you” but “I beseech you, because of what God has already done for you.” We do not serve Christ in order to receive His mercies, because we already have them (3:21–8:39). We serve Him out of love and appreciation.

True dedication is the presenting of body, mind, and will to God day by day. It is daily yielding the body to Him, having the mind renewed by the Word, and surrendering the will through prayer and obedience. Every Christian is either a conformer, living for and like the world, or a transformer, daily becoming more like Christ. (The Gk. word for “transform” is the same as the one for “transfigure” in Matt. 17:2.) Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us that we are transformed (transfigured) as we allow the Spirit to reveal Christ through the Word of God. It is only when the believer is thus dedicated to God that he can know God’s will for his life. God does not have three wills (good, acceptable,

and perfect) for believers in the way that there are three choices for merchandise in the mail order catalogs (“good, better, best”). Rather, we grow in our appreciation of God’s will. Some Christians obey God because they know that obedience is good for them, and they fear chastening. Others obey because they find God’s will acceptable. But the deepest devotion is in those who love God’s will and find it perfect.

As priests, we are to present “spiritual sacrifices” to God (1 Peter 2:5), and the first sacrifice He wants each day is our body, mind, and will in total surrender to Him.

## **II. A Member of the Body (12:3–8)**

In 1 Cor. 12 we find the same truth spoken of in these verses, that the believer is baptized by the Spirit into the body and is given a gift (or gifts) to use for the benefit of the whole church. There is a “universal body” made up of all believers in Christ from Pentecost to the rapture; but there is also the local body, through which each believer ministers to the Lord. Most of the 112 references in the NT to the church refer to a local congregation of believers.

Service in the local body begins with personal dedication (vv. 1–2) and then an honest evaluation of the spiritual gifts the believer possesses (v. 3). Paul does not tell us not to think of ourselves at all, but that we should not think of ourselves more highly than our spiritual gifts warrant. If a man is called to pastor, God will reveal it as he uses his gifts in the assembly. Our gifts differ, but they all come from the Spirit and are to be used for the glory of Christ. Just as we are saved “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8–9), so we are to exercise our spiritual gifts “according to the measure of faith” (v. 3) and “according to the grace given” (v. 6).

Paul lists seven ministries: (1) *prophecy*, which is defined in 1 Cor. 14:3; (2) *ministry*, which is literally “deaconing” (serving) and may refer to that office; (3) *teaching*, according to 2 Tim. 2:1–2, an important responsibility; (4) *exhorting*, which means encouraging people to serve the Lord and be faithful to Him; (5) *giving*, which should be done in singleness of heart out of pure motives (see Acts 5); (6) *ruling*, pertaining to the government of the local church (1 Tim. 3:4 and 12); (7) *showing mercy*, sharing with those in need.

Eph. 4:7–12 describes the gifted people which Christ has given to the church; Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12 both describe the gifts which the Spirit has given believers in the local body. It is a dangerous thing to try to serve the Lord when no gift has been given; and it is also tragic to refuse to use a gift for His glory (2 Tim. 1:6). The twelve men in Acts 19:1–7 were ignorant of the Spirit and His gifts; the seven men of Acts 19:13–16 tried to counterfeit gifts they did not possess.

## **III. A Member of the Family (12:9–13)**

Each believer has his or her own spiritual service to perform, but vv. 9–13 tell us how every Christian should behave in the family of God. Love should be honest and without hypocrisy (see 1 John 3:18). We should hate evil and cling to the good (see Ps. 97:10). Love should lead to kindness and humility, faithfulness in business, fervency in spiritual things (“fervent” here means “boiling, aglow with power”). Note how the characteristics

mentioned in this section parallel the fruit of the Spirit that Paul describes in Gal. 5:22–23.

Christians in the local church should care for each other and share with each other. Note how the prayer of v. 12 is followed by the care of v. 13. “Given to hospitality” is literally in the Gk. “pursuing hospitality”—going after people! First Peter 4:9 tells us to stop complaining when we open our homes to others. Unspiritual hospitality is pictured in Prov. 23:6–8. See also Luke 14:12–14; 1 Tim. 3:2 and 5:10; Heb. 13:2; 3 John 6–8

#### **IV. A Soldier in the Battle (12:14–21)**

Christians have their battles as well as their blessings, and Paul instructs us how to handle those who oppose the Word. We are to bless them (Matt. 5:10–12) and not curse. Of course, no believer should get into trouble because of wrong living (1 Peter 2:11–25). We should have sympathy (v. 15) and humility (v. 16), for selfishness and pride generate ill will. Christians are never to “pay back” their opponents; rather, we should wait for God to “repay” (v. 19), either in this life or in the future judgment.

“Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (v. 17) suggests that the Christian lives in a “glass house” and must be aware of the scrutiny of others. “I’m going to live my own life!” is a sinful attitude for a believer, in the light of Rom. 14:7–8. People are watching us, and as much as possible, we should live peaceably with all people. Of course, we cannot compromise with sin or have a “peace at any price” attitude. The attitude and spirit of Matt. 5:38–48 will help us be “peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).

In vv. 19–21, Paul refers to Prov. 25:21–22 and Deut. 32:35. (See also Heb 10:30.) The principle stated here is that the believer has turned himself over to the Lord (12:1–2), and therefore the Lord must take care of him and help fight his battles. We need spiritual wisdom (James 1:5) when it comes to dealing with the enemies of the cross, lest we be a bad testimony on the one hand, or cheapen the Gospel on the other. Paul used the Roman law on three occasions to protect himself and the testimony of the Gospel (see Acts 16:35–40; 22:24–29; 25:10–12), yet he was willing to become all things to all men that he might win some to Christ. If we practice Rom. 12:1–2 daily, we can be sure He will direct us in obeying the rest of the chapter.

## **Romans 13**

Christians have been called out of this world (John 15:18 and 17:14), but they still have responsibilities to the state. The best citizen ought to be the Christian citizen. Though the church is not to get involved in party politics, individual believers certainly should use their God-given privileges as citizens to see to it that the best leaders are elected and the best laws are enacted and enforced justly. When we think of godly leaders like Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, who were able to exercise spiritual ministries in pagan governments, we can see what the Spirit can do through the dedicated believer. In this chapter, Paul gives us four motives for obeying human government.



## **I. For Wrath's Sake (13:1–4)**

The “higher powers” (v. 1) are the rulers of government, even though they may not be Christians. We thank God that the Gospel can reach a government official, such as Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23), and some of Nero’s officials (Phil. 4:22). But we must recognize the fact that even an unsaved government official is a minister of God. Even if we cannot respect the person, we must respect the God-ordained office.

Rulers are a terror to bad people, not to good people; so people who live consistent Christian lives need not fear. (Of course, where the government is openly opposed to Christ, Acts 5:29 is the principle to follow.) Keep in mind that God ordained human government, including capital punishment, after the flood (see Gen. 8:20–9:7). The church is not to bear the sword; the government does that. God has established only three institutions on earth: the home (Gen. 2), the church (Acts 2), and human government (Gen. 9). Their functions are not to overlap; when they do, there is confusion and trouble.

## **II. For Conscience's Sake (13:5–7)**

Fear is perhaps the lowest motive for Christian obedience; a Spirit-directed conscience lifts us to a higher level. The Christian should experience the Spirit witnessing to his or her conscience (Rom. 9:1); and, if we disobey the Lord, we know it when the Spirit convicts our consciences. Some people have an evil conscience that is unreliable. The obedient Christian should have a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:5). To disobey constantly and refuse the witness of the Spirit in the conscience leads to a defiled conscience (Titus 1:15), a seared (or calloused) conscience (1 Tim. 4:2), and finally a rejected conscience (1 Tim. 1:19).

Paul admonishes us to pay taxes (tribute), pay customs (on material things), and show proper honor to all officials. See 1 Peter 2:17ff.

## **III. For Love's Sake (13:8–10)**

Now Paul enlarges the circle to include not only government officials, but our neighbors as well. Keep in mind that the NT definition of a neighbor has nothing to do with street addresses or geography. In Luke 10:29, the lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–36), Jesus changed the question to, “Which of these three was neighbor to him?” The issue is not “who is my neighbor?” but “to whom can I be a neighbor for the glory of Christ?” It is not a matter of law, but love—and this is what Paul deals with here.

While the believer lives under the law of the land, he also lives under a much higher law as a citizen of heaven: the law of love. In fact, love is the fulfillment of the law, because love from the heart enables us to obey what the law demands. A husband does not labor all day because the law tells him to support his family, but because he loves them. Where there is love there will be no murder, dishonesty, stealing, or other kinds of selfishness.

Note that Paul says nothing about the Sabbath; the Sabbath Law was actually part of the Jewish ceremonial code and never applied to the Gentiles or to the church. Nine

of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the epistles for Christians to obey, but the commandment about the Sabbath is not repeated.

It is often difficult for us to love those who reject the Gospel and ridicule our Christian testimony, but this love can come from the Spirit (Rom. 5:5) and reach out to them. “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8). More people are won through love than through arguments. The Christian who is walking in love is the best citizen and the best witness.

#### **IV. For the Savior’s Sake (13:11–14)**

We reach the pinnacle of motives in these verses: from fear to conscience to love to devotion to Christ. “Our salvation” is nearer in the sense that Christ’s coming for the church is nearer today than ever before. By “salvation” Paul means the total blessing that we will have when Christ comes—including new bodies and a new home.

Christians belong to the light, not the dark. They should be awake and alert, behaving as those who have seen the light of the Gospel (2 Cor. 4). Moreover, no believer wants to be found in sin when Christ returns! “The day is at hand!” (See Heb. 10:25ff.)

Paul lists a number of sins here, sins that ought never to be named among the saints. Note that drinking and immorality often go together and result in strife and division. How many homes have been broken up over drink! Verse 14 gives us the dual responsibility of the believer: positively, to “put on Christ”—that is, make Christ Lord of your daily life; negatively, to “make no provision for the flesh”—that is, deliberately avoid that which tempts you to sin. It is wrong for Christians to “plan for sin.” Vance Havner said that when David left the battlefield and returned to Jerusalem, “he was making arrangements to sin.” In the light of the soon-coming Christ, it is our responsibility to live sober, spiritual, clean lives.

The last days will be days of lawlessness (see 2 Tim. 3 and 1 John 3:4). It will be increasingly difficult for dedicated Christians to maintain their testimony. Governments will become more opposed to the Bible and to Christ, until at last the Man of Sin welds the world into one great satanic system to oppose the truth. Read 2 Tim. 3:12–4:5 to see what God expects from us in these last days.

## **Romans 14**

Romans 14:1–15:7 deals with the problem of questionable things in the Christian life and what to do when sincere Christians disagree about personal practices. Paul recognizes that in each local church there are mature believers (“We that are strong,” 15:1) as well as immature (“him that is weak in faith,” 14:1), and that these two groups may disagree on how the Christian is to live. The Jewish Christians might want to cling to special holy days and OT dietary laws, while the Gentile believers might turn their Christian liberty into license and offend their Jewish brothers and sisters. Many Christians have the false notion that extreme legalism (observing days and diets) shows

strong faith, but Paul states that just the opposite is true! It is the Christian that is mature in the faith who recognizes the truths found in Col. 2:18–23.

In the church today we have differences on how to regard such things as worldly amusements, and Paul tells us how to face and solve these differences. He does not give a list of rules; rather, he lays down six basic principles that can be applied by all Christians of all stages of growth. We can state these principles in the form of questions and test our own lives.

### **I. Am I Fully Convinced? (14:1–5)**

Christians are not to act from mere emotion, but from settled inward convictions that are the result of diligent prayer and study of the Word. There would be no serious disagreements if every Christian acted from conviction. Someone has said that opinions are what we hold, while convictions are what hold us. The stronger Christian is not to despise the weaker one for his or her immaturity; neither is the weaker believer to judge his or her more mature brothers and sisters for their liberty. God has received both in Jesus Christ and we should receive each other. Our lives are to be directed by Him, not by people's ideas or judgments. Mature Christians know why they behave as they do, and these convictions control their lives.

### **II. Am I Doing This Unto the Lord? (14:6–9)**

"I'm living my own life!" is a statement no Christian ought to make, for we belong to the Lord, whether we live or die. He is the Lord, and we must live to please Him. So often the Christian who has questionable practices in his or her life cannot honestly say that these practices are done as "unto the Lord"; for in reality, they are practiced for selfish pleasure and not to honor the Lord. Christians who observe special days as unto the Lord will be accepted by the Lord, and we should not judge them. It is between them and their Lord.

### **III. Will It Stand the Test at the Judgment Seat? (14:10–12)**

We have no right to judge our brethren, for we will all have our works tested at the judgment seat of Christ—not the White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11–15, but the testing of the Christian's works after the church is called home (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:10ff). We do not have to give an account of our brother's life, so we have no right to condemn him today. Certainly all of us want to live lives that will stand the fiery test before Christ, lives that will win rewards for His glory.

### **IV. Am I Causing Others to Stumble? (14:13–21)**

There is one thing we should judge: we should judge ourselves to see whether we are abusing our Christian liberty and making others stumble. Certainly nothing is unclean of itself, but some practices and habits are considered unclean by others. Therefore, if we deliberately do something that makes our brothers stumble, we're not living according to the rule of love.

It is a serious thing to cause another person to stumble and fall into sin. Note Christ's words in Mark 9:33–50, where “offend” means “cause to stumble.” The believer who holds on to his questionable practice and causes another Christian to fall in his walk with God is blind to the price Jesus paid on the cross. Our good should not cause evil talk. After all, the Christian life is not a matter of eating or drinking (or any other practice), but one of righteousness and peace and joy, all of which come from the Spirit. Our aim should be not to please ourselves, but to build up (edify) other Christians in love. 1 Corinthians 10:23 states that all things are lawful for the believer (for we do not live under law), but not everything builds us up or helps to build up others. See also 1 Cor. 8. “Destroy” in Rom. 14:15 and 20 means “tear down.” How selfish for a Christian to tear down another believer's spiritual life because of his own selfish living. His practices may be lawful, but they do not come under the law of love.

#### **V. Am I Doing This by Faith? (14:22–23)**

The Gk. word for “faith” in v. 22 means almost the same as “conviction,” for our convictions are born of faith in God's Word. These two verses lay down the principle that the Christian life is between the believer and his Lord, and that the believer must always be sure he is right with the Lord. If there are doubts about some of his practices, he cannot have joy and peace. “Damned” in v. 23 has nothing to do with eternal punishment; it should read “condemned.” That is, the Christian who engages in practices with a doubtful mind is condemning himself and those practices by his very attitude. Whatever we do that is not of faith is sin, for the Christian lives by faith. “Faith comes by ... the Word of God,” says Rom. 10:17 (NKJV); so anything I do that I cannot back up by the Word of God is sin, because I cannot do it by faith.

“If it's doubtful, it's dirty!” is a good policy to follow. No one would drink milk or water that possibly was contaminated; nor would we accept food that might possibly be poisoned. Yet many Christians carelessly engage in practices that even the world questions. They never face the fact that whatever is doubtful is not of faith, and therefore is sin.

#### **VI. Am I Pleasing Myself or Others? (15:1–7)**

These verses fit best in chapter 14's outline. The strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the immature Christians, and while doing this, seek to build them up in the faith. We should follow Christ's example and seek to please others, not ourselves (Ps. 69:9). Does this OT verse apply to the NT Christian? Of course it does, for the OT was given for our learning, that we might receive patience (endurance), comfort, and hope from the promises of God. We ought to be like-minded, and we will be if all believers seek to help others grow in the Lord. Paul's final conclusion in v. 7 is: receive one another, for Christ has received you. This will bring glory to God.

Local churches have the right to establish standards, but not beyond what the Word teaches. We must lovingly allow for differences among Christians and not use these differences as opportunities for division.

# Romans 15

This chapter concerns the Jews and the Gentiles in the church, and reveals three different ministries that we must recognize and understand:

## I. Christ's Ministry to Jew and Gentile (15:8–13)

The Bible student who fails to recognize Christ's dual ministry, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile, will never rightly divide the Word of truth. When Christ was born, His coming was announced to the Jewish nation and related to the OT promises. As v. 8 states clearly, Christ was first a minister to the Jews for the purpose of confirming the OT covenants and promises. See Luke 1:30–33, 46–55, and 67–80. These Spirit-filled Jews knew that Christ had come to deliver them from the Gentiles and establish the promised kingdom.

But what happened? The people of Israel rejected their King on three occasions: (1) they allowed Herod to murder the King's messenger, John the Baptist; (2) they asked for Christ to be murdered; (3) they themselves murdered Stephen. In the Gospels and Acts, the Gospel is delivered "to the Jew first." Had Israel received Christ, the kingdom would have been set up, and the blessings would have flowed out to the Gentiles through a converted Israel. Paul has already shown in Rom. 9–11 that it is through Israel's fall (not her rise to glory) that the Gospel of God's grace has now gone to the Gentiles. There is a pattern of progress in vv. 9–11; the Gentiles hear the Word (Ps. 18:49); the Gentiles rejoice with the Jews (Deut. 32:43); all the Gentiles praise God on their own (Ps. 117:1); and the Gentiles trust Christ and enjoy His reign (Isa. 11:10). These verses almost summarize the spiritual history of Israel: v. 9 (see Acts 10–14), when the Jews witnessed to the Gentiles; v. 10 (see Acts 15–28), when Jews and Gentiles shared in the church's witness; v. 11 (Acts 28), when Israel was finally set aside and the Gentiles given the prominent place in God's program (as described in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians); and v. 12, the future kingdom, shared by the Gentiles.

The theme of the Gentile praise is Christ. Speaking of that future day when the King reigns, v. 12 says, "In Him shall the Gentiles trust" (or hope). Paul then picks up the theme of "hope" in the prayer of v. 13. We do not have to wait to have joy, peace, and hope; the Spirit can give us those blessings now.

## II. Paul's Ministry to Jew and Gentile (15:14–22)

Paul is anxious to emphasize that he is the apostle to the Gentiles. Failure to see the special place of Paul's ministry in the program of God will bring confusion to one's Bible study. In v. 16, Paul pictures himself as a NT priest, offering up the Gentiles to God as his sacrifice of praise. Every time we win a soul to Christ, it is offering another sacrifice to His glory.

His special ministry involved a special message (the Gospel of the grace of God, v. 16), special miracles (vv. 18–19), and a special method (v. 20, going where Christ had not been preached). Paul was a pioneer; he did not mix law and grace, faith and works,

or Israel and the church, the way some teachers do today. We know that the Jews require a sign (1 Cor. 1:22), but God also gave miracles for the Gentiles (at Ephesus for instance—see Acts 19:11–12). We should not think, then, that because there are miracles recorded after Acts 7 (Israel’s final rejection) that God is still dealing with the nation of Israel.

Paul had been hindered from going to Rome, not by Satan, but by the demands of ministry in so many places where the Gospel had not been preached. Now that he had covered all the ground possible, he was ready for his visit to Rome. The fact that Paul was willing to preach in Rome indicates that no other apostle had been there (Peter, for example); for his policy was to go to areas untouched by the Gospel.

### **III. The Gentile Churches’ Ministry to the Jews (15:23–33)**

Paul desired to go to Spain; whether or not he ever got there, the Bible does not say. Tradition says he did. At any rate, at the time he wrote this letter he was engaged in taking a relief offering to the poverty-stricken Jews in Palestine, an offering contributed by the Gentile churches he had founded. For details, see 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8–9.

Paul gives several reasons for this offering:

(1) *Spiritual obligation*, v. 27. Since the Gentiles had received all their spiritual blessings through the Jews, the Gentiles were to pay them back in some measure with material things. Christians today need to bear in mind that the Gentiles are debtors to the Jews.

(2) *Personal love*, v. 29. Paul had a great burden for the Jews, and by bringing the offering, he would express this love to them.

(3) *Christian unity*, v. 31. Some of the Jewish believers (remember Acts 15) were not happy about the entrance of Gentiles into the fold. This offering was to help to heal the breach that some caused by saying that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians.

This passage raises the question of the responsibility Gentile Christians have to Jews today. Certainly the program of “to the Jew first” (1:16) was valid during the period of the Gospels and Acts 1–7 but no longer applies today. Our obligation to the Jews stems from the Great Commission, the grace of God, who chose us and grafted us into the olive tree (Rom. 11:20ff), and the plain logic of Rom. 10:11–17. As far as condemnation is concerned, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. As far as salvation is concerned, there is also no difference. But Israel is still God’s chosen nation, though set aside and blinded temporarily; Israel is beloved for the fathers’ sakes (Rom. 11:28). No Christian should be guilty of anti-Jewish feelings or practices. Rather, we should seek to witness to them and win them to Christ. As a nation, Israel has been blinded; but individual Jews can find Christ as the Spirit opens their eyes.

Note that in v. 31 Paul anticipated trouble with the unbelieving Jews, and that trouble came! Review Acts 21:15ff and note how the unsaved Jews treated Paul.

This chapter emphasizes once again the importance of distinguishing between the Jew, Gentile, and church (1 Cor. 10:32). In fact, Paul’s last words to the Romans (16:25–27) deal with that great mystery of the church, which Paul was to reveal through his message. May we never fail as stewards of His mysteries!

# Romans 16

This chapter may appear to be a boring one, but it is filled with surprises. As we read this list of names, we cannot help but be impressed with the fact that Paul loved people and was interested in them. No doubt many of these people were his converts who had found their way to Rome; Paul had never visited Rome and certainly had to have met these saints in other cities. Like his Master, Paul knew the sheep by name and had a personal concern for each one.

## I. Some Saints to Greet (16:1–16)

It seems that the believers in Rome did not meet in one general assembly but were members of various household flocks. Note vv. 5, 10, 11, and 15. There was no “church at Rome” in the organized sense (compare Phil. 1:1). Rome was a large city, and it is possible that some of the assemblies were composed mainly of Jewish believers.

Phoebe was evidently a deaconess on her way to Rome, and hence the bearer of the epistle. “Receive her and assist her” (v. 2) are good admonitions for Christians today. Some scholars suggest that she was going to Rome for assistance with a legal problem, and thus Paul was asking the saints to aid her with this special problem.

We meet Priscilla and Aquila again! What dear friends they were to Paul! Review Acts 18:2–28, 1 Cor. 16:19, and 2 Tim. 4:19. The incident where these two saints risked their lives for Paul is not recorded in the NT, but how indebted the church is to them for saving him! They had left Rome because of persecution, had met Paul in Corinth, and now were building a church in their house back in Rome. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord and the workings of His providence!

Nine women are mentioned in this chapter: Phoebe, v. 1; Priscilla, v. 3; Mary, v. 6; Tryphena, v. 12; Tryphosa, v. 12; Persis, v. 12; the mother of Rufus, v. 13; Julia, v. 15; and the sister of Nereus, v. 15. Some critics have accused Paul of being against women, but no man ever did more to emancipate women from heathen bondage and dignify them in the manner God intended from the beginning. Paul teaches that women have a special and important place in the ministry of the local church.

In several verses, Paul mentions his “kinsmen” (vv. 7, 11, 21). This does not necessarily mean blood relative, but more likely fellow Jews, possibly of the tribe of Benjamin.

Verse 7 mentions two men who were saved before Paul was, and were also noted by the apostles. They were not apostles themselves, but were held in repute among the apostles.

Rufus is an interesting man (v. 13). Mark 15:21 states that the Simon who carried the cross was the father of Alexander and Rufus, as though these two men were well-known among the churches at the time Mark wrote his Gospel. It is possible that Simon was actually the father of the Rufus of v. 13, and that he also won his mother to the Lord. If he and his family stayed in Jerusalem, it is possible that they had Paul in their home, and that Paul “adopted” Rufus’s mother as his own.

## **II. Some Sinners to Avoid (16:17–20)**

This warning sounds foreign in a chapter filled with greetings, but Paul knew the dangers in the churches and wanted to warn the saints. Certainly we as individual Christians are to love and forgive one another; but sins against the church body must be dealt with according to scriptural discipline. Christians who cause trouble because of their selfish desires (usually pride—they want to tell everybody else what to do) are not to be received into the local fellowship. “Mark them—avoid them!” The word “mark” means “watch them; keep your eyes on them.” It is right for the church to keep an eye on “church tramps” who run from one church to another, causing trouble and division. These people are smooth talkers and know how to fool the simple, but the discerning saint will see through their disguises. Conquer Satan—don’t let him conquer you!

## **III. Some Servants to Honor (16:21–24)**

What a grand list of veterans! In these verses we find Timothy, Paul’s son in the faith and a servant of the Lord (Phil. 2:19–22), and Lucius, who was associated with Paul in the early days at Antioch (Acts 13:1). (It is not likely that this person is Luke.) Jason traveled with Paul from Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–9); Sosipater was a Berean (Acts 20:4). Paul loved these companions and could not have ministered without them. Not everyone can be a Paul, but all of us can help others to serve Christ more effectively.

Tertius was the amanuensis (secretary) to whom Paul dictated the letter, as the Spirit directed him. It is probable that he was a Roman, known by the believers to whom the letter was sent.

Gaius may be the same person mentioned in Acts 19:29; or perhaps Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4). He is surely the Gaius of 1 Cor. 1:14, one of the men whom Paul baptized during his ministry at Corinth. Paul was at Corinth when he wrote to the Romans, so this would mean he was staying at the home of Gaius. See how many people the Lord uses to give us His Word: an inspired apostle, a faithful secretary, a friendly Christian host, and a sacrificing woman!

Erastus was the city treasurer, thus showing that the Gospel had reached into the official families of the city. (See Phil. 4:22.) He may be the same man mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:20. “And Quartus, a brother!” No saint is too insignificant for Paul to mention! Read 1 Thes. 5:12–13 and see how this thought applies there.

Paul always signed his letters personally with his “grace signature” (2 Thes. 3:17–18), and he does so here in v. 24. It is likely that he went on to add personally this great doxology that emphasizes the mystery of the church. The prophets mentioned in v. 26 are the NT prophets through whom God revealed the truths of the church and the Gospel of grace. See Acts 13:1, 15:32, 21:10; 1 Cor. 12:28–29, 14:29–32; Eph. 2:20, 3:5, 4:11.

Thus the letter to the Romans is completed. If we understand it and apply it, v. 27 will be true: “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever!”