

Book of Romans Study Part 30 October 5, 2022

Fast Facts (when, where, who, and why):

When: *Written in AD 57, during Paul's third missionary trip*

Where: *Written when Paul was in Corinth*

Who: *Written to the early church in Rome*

Why: *To present the basic gospel of Jesus Christ, God's plan of salvation and righteousness for all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike.*

Last week we started chapter 11, where we talked about remnants.

God works through remnants. Meaning, a remaining group of faithful ones who were once part of a much larger group. So therefore, Don't give up! God chooses to be moved by a faithful few.

Tonight we'll continue in Chapter 11, where Paul now talks about ingrafted branches.

Romans 11:11-24

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

As we unpack this, I want to look at the first verse we read:

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?

Nobody is beyond recovery with God!

Another way of saying it:

Nobody has drifted so far God wouldn't chase after them.

We saw this last Sunday:

Isaiah 53:6

*⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

God knows our tendency to wander off. But instead of punishing us for wandering, He punished His Son once and for all. He did this so we would no longer be obligated to the wandering.

We may think we've gone too far, but God never does...He is willing to chase us down.

(Story of Gayle...Hosea)

We have a saying in recovery: *Don't give up before the miracle happens.*

And besides, God is always at work. Nothing takes Him by surprise.

God used the rebellion of the Jews to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 53:1

*¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

John 1:11-13

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

And in our text tonight:

Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

i.e. God did all of this with the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. Can you imagine how it will be when the Jews come around too?

Remember, it was the persecution of early Christian church that brought on the propagation of the Gospel in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth

Paul goes on:

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

i.e. I am committed to my calling to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. However, I have to be honest, I am hoping the Jews will realize what they're missing and want to get in on what God is doing.

Now check this out:

? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

i.e. At the core of it all is a Holy God. He has established roots of His work and those roots are holy.

We need to remember that. God is still sovereign! Nothing is going on this world that God is not aware of! He has a plan!

God has never abdicated His throne!

He is holy, and His work is holy. And part of His plan is to make us holy by grafting us into His family.

Hebrews 2:11

¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Let's all say this: *If the root is holy, so are the branches! And I am a branch!*

Going on in v17:

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

In other words....*don't get a big head about this...*

Some of the tree's branches were pruned, enabling you to be grafted in. But they were pruned because they were dead branches - dead because of their unbelief. Don't gloat over this...and don't get a holier than thou attitude over the pruned branches. You are fed by a holy and rich root. You are not the ones doing the feeding. And He could cut you off too if you get hardened and prideful like the original branches.

i.e. stay humble.

Romans 12:3

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Paul goes on in v22:

²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

i.e. Go into this with eyes wide open. Don't get comfortable...and don't be deceived into complacency.

Galatians 6:7-8

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

So yes, We should consider the kindness of God, but temper it with His holiness.

That's good balance...Enjoy the kindness of the Lord, while living in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 1:7

*⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

And then Paul goes on to say *If the Jews stop their unbelief and come around, it would be such a natural thing. No grafting necessary really...they are still by nature part of the natural root.*

But the big question is...will they?

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. ⁷ What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, ⁸ as it is written:

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
 eyes that could not see
 and ears that could not hear,
 to this very day."

⁹ And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap,
 a stumbling block and a retribution for them."

¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
 and their backs be bent forever."

With everything Paul said in Chapter 10 about the stubbornness of the Israelites...he asked the rhetorical question...

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people?

Then he introduces again the concept of a faithful remnant. God rejected *many* of the people because of their rebellion and stubbornness. But He didn't reject the *whole* lot of them. There were a faithful few. And Paul was one of them.

In back in Romans 9, Paul reminded us of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

*"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.*

That is challenging and scary, yes. But also encouraging for us today.

God works through remnants.

Remnant: a small remaining portion.

In a Biblical sense, it represents A remaining group of faithful ones who were once part of a much larger group.

What about the rest of the group? Indeed, what happened?

Here's the takeaway for us today when we talk about remnants:

Don't give up! God chooses to be moved by a faithful few.

Paul goes on:

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Now Paul is bringing the prophet Elijah into the discussion. He is referencing the scene in 1 Kings 19, where Elijah had a major victory over the false prophets of Baal. Let's look at this scene that follows that victory:

1 Kings 19:1-18

¹ Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁰ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹¹ The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹⁵ The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu

son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

OK...that’s the full story of what happened to Elijah in this scene being described by Paul. And we’ll get back to Paul’s point in a minute, but there’s a few things I want to point out about this story of Elijah:

First of all, notice what Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, said...

¹ Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

Idle threats, right? Elijah had a great victory...and God was honored. So everything’s great, right. Elijah must’ve heard these idle threats and scoffed. His confidence was at an all-time high, right? Well....

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

Isn’t comforting to know you’re not the only one capable of going from a spiritual high to a spiritual low in a matter of minutes.

I mean, come on, Elijah!

But as we are chuckling at Elijah, let’s not overlook the grace of God in this story. Let’s unpack it a little and see if God has any nuggets for us...

First of all, I want to point out that

God didn’t condemn Elijah for his fear.

When you look at the weakness Elijah showed...running for his life...wanting to die...it would be easy to think God would have been angry and at least scolded him, right?

Instead, God sent an angel to attend to him...to give him food and water.

Psalm 103:8-12

*⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*

*⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;*

*¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;*

*¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Isaiah 57:16

*¹⁶ I will not accuse them forever,
nor will I always be angry,
for then they would faint away because of me—
the very people I have created.*

And next, I want to point out:

God remedied Elijah's feeling of failure by giving him his next assignment.

God was not swayed a bit by Elijah's weakness! He had a plan and He was going to carry it out! *God graciously showed Elijah he was still on the team!*

So God met Elijah at his struggle...lovingly ministered to his needs...and strengthened him for the work he had for him.

Somebody needs to hear me say this: *God is not done with you!*

He wants to meet you at your place of despair...your feelings of loss and failure...He wants to minister healing to you because, first, He loves you...and second, because He still has a work for you!

And get this...*Before He sends you to your next task, God wants to have an encounter with you.*

Look at this scene...God sends Elijah on a 40 day journey to a mountain, and when he gets there, he hides in a cave. God met him there and said *“What are doing in this cave? I didn’t send you here to hide. Come out to the mountain...I want you to experience my presence...you will need this in order to walk in the power and authority I have called you to”*

Sometimes we hide in caves, don’t we? What cave have you been hiding in? It’s time to come out of the cave and stand on the mountain!

Reminds me of Psalm 24...who may ascend to the hill of the Lord...

And when Elijah stood on the mountain, he was tested to learn to hear the voice of God.

A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks - but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper...that still small voice.

God had a great calling on Elijah’s life and He wanted Elijah to learn how to hear His voice.

To discern...to separate God’s voice from the rest of the noise!

And notice...even when he heard God still small voice...he went back to his hiding place and felt sorry for himself.

Guys: *We will never be able to hear God’s voice with a victim mentality.*

But again...God was patient...He asked again *“What are you doing here?”*

I still have a great work for you. I am not done with these people you think aren’t listening to you. Some are listening to you...a small faithful remnant. I will save that remnant and show my glory through them.”

And what was originally meant to be a blessing for all the people, ended up being a blessing for only the faithful few. What happened to the others?

⁷ What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, ⁸ as it is written:

“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that could not see
and ears that could not hear,
to this very day.”

⁹ And David says:

“May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.
¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever.”

Yikes!

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:

*“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”*

¹⁹ *Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,*

*“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”*

²⁰ *And Isaiah boldly says,*

*“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”*

²¹ *But concerning Israel he says,*

*“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.”*

OK, let’s unpack this...Look at the progression of the questions Paul is asking in vv14-15

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?

Let’s reverse it to get a better understanding:

Someone is sent by God to preach.

Someone hears the preaching.

They believe what they heard.

They call on the One in whom they have believed.

This shows the importance of understanding how God chooses to partner with us to share the good news.

Do you share the gospel regularly?

1 Peter 3:15

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

This is actually part of the Armor of God described in Ephesians 6:10-17

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This is all part of the preparedness God calls us to.

So then Paul says in v15:

As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

This is in reference to Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah 52:7

*⁷ How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”*

Paul goes on:

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”

So just because the message was being delivered – doesn’t mean it was being received. Which presents the quandary Paul presents...

*¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”*

Faith comes by hearing – and hearing by the Word of Christ.

But here's the problem...the Word was going out. It just wasn't being heard...*really* heard.

Apparently – *There is a difference between physical hearing and spiritual hearing.*

Spiritual hearing means receiving and believing.

Isaiah 53:1

*¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

John 1:11-13

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

And James said:

James 1:22

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

So therefore: *Spiritual hearing involves obedience to what is heard.*

Then Paul goes on in v19:

*¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,
“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”*

This is in reference to Deuteronomy 32:19-21

*¹⁹ The LORD saw this and rejected them
because he was angered by his sons and daughters.*

*²⁰ “I will hide my face from them,” he said,
“and see what their end will be;
for they are a perverse generation,
children who are unfaithful.*

*²¹ They made me jealous by what is no god
and angered me with their worthless idols.*

*I will make them envious by those who are not a people;
I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.*

This is a rebuke of God's people for their rebellion. *Not only had Israel heard the message - they literally saw the message, the shekinah glory of God.* (His physical and visible presence) *Yet, they still chose to rebel.*

And look at v20 of what we just read in Deuteronomy:

*²⁰ "I will hide my face from them," he said,
"and see what their end will be;
for they are a perverse generation,
children who are unfaithful.*

Yikes! *Hide my face from them!*

No wonder David wrote in his famous penitential psalm:

Psalm 51:10-13

*¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

And back to Romans 10:19:

*¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,
"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."*

God is saying that as part of His rebuke of His people, He will remove His blessing from them, and bless others that aren't really part of *any* nation, much less the nation of Israel...He will make Israel angry and jealous as they see God blessing other people that haven't even heard the message...

Again, this is quite a rebuke of Israel.

And it helps to stop and remember what brought all this on...

Not only had they heard the message...they "saw" the message...the shekinah glory of God. Yet, they still chose to rebel.

And now Paul finishes chapter 10 with:

²⁰ *And Isaiah boldly says,*

*“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”*

²¹ *But concerning Israel he says,*

*“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.”*

This is a reference to Isaiah 65:1-2

¹ *“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;*

I was found by those who did not seek me.

To a nation that did not call on my name,

I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’

² *All day long I have held out my hands*

to an obstinate people,

who walk in ways not good,

pursuing their own imaginations—

Message Version:

“I’ve made myself available

to those who haven’t bothered to ask.

I’m here, ready to be found

by those who haven’t bothered to look.

I kept saying ‘I’m here, I’m right here’

to a nation that ignored me.

I reached out day after day

to a people who turned their backs on me,

People who make wrong turns,

who insist on doing things their own way.

Again, I think of John 1: 11-13

¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*

I read all that and I think “Wow, these people were indeed stubborn and stiff-necked. I sure am glad I didn’t live during those times. Then I thought to myself...

*Am I capable of ignoring God?
Am I capable of turning my back on Him at times?
Am I capable of making wrong turns and doing things my own way?*

And I am reminded of what the Bible says:

1 Corinthians 10:12

¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

¹ Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

⁵ Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." ⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

So we see Paul is continuing further with his concern for Israel. And his main concern was that they be saved.

I wonder if we should have that same attitude for others?

**Unsaved loved ones? Neighbors...the culture that hates us...
*My heart's desire and prayer to God for _____ is that they may be saved.***

Then look what he says about them:

² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Interesting...

They are zealous, alright...albeit, a *misplaced* zeal...but nonetheless, zealous.

And what is their zeal based on? Well, we know it wasn't based on *knowledge*.

The Israelites had zeal for their heritage and traditions, but no real knowledge of the heart of God.

That's why it was misplaced zeal. Meanwhile, the representation of God's knowledge...God Himself in the flesh, was right there among them, and they refused to acknowledge Him. They were so big on the law and the teaching of the prophets, yet Jesus Christ, who was the culmination of it all was walking among them and they refused to see it. Verse 4 of Romans 10 says:

⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

And Jesus said about Himself: Matthew 5:17

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Now, look at the scene in Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Again, He used the word “fulfilled”. In other words...the prophets...the law and the prophecies...they all pointed to Jesus Christ.

And He did this why?....

⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law *so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

Jesus did this so that anyone who believed in Him would have His righteousness...in right standing with God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Message version:

In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

Paul goes on further in v5 of Romans 10:

⁵ Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.” ⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

First of all...this is a reference to several Old Testament scriptures:

Let's look at each individually. Paul says in v5:

⁵ Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

That is a reference to Leviticus 18

Leviticus 18:1-5

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. ³ You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. ⁴ You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. ⁵ Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

vv6-7 Paul says:

⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

These are references to Deut 30

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

The Offer of Life or Death

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

**Wow, there is a lot here. Did you notice God presents to us a choice?
Choose life, that you might live...**

God lays out a great plan of blessing, but requires that we choose to obey.

But we are not choosing this as if it is some great mystery that we must ascend to heaven to grasp...or go to the depths of the abyss...

***It is laid out clearly for us...obey God...do as He says...and it will go well for us!**

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

This is right out of Deuteronomy 30:14

¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Also notice - we are choosing more than just following the law...we are choosing righteousness that comes by faith.

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

This is the gospel message: It is no longer about going to great lengths to achieve some level of righteousness by the law. Instead – we immediately receive righteousness by faith, by trusting in Jesus.

And notice...we must become fully engaged in this process...not just going by emotion and “feeling” something. Not just repeating some tradition or liturgy

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

This is interesting when you break it down...

Declaring with our mouth...believing in our hearts...

Declare...another version says “confess” which means agree with.

Declaring that we agree with God’s Word that says Jesus is the Way!

And in order to *declare* that...it needs to come from within.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:34**

³⁴ ...For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

i.e. my heart is full of belief...I believe with everything in me...as sure as the day is light and the night is dark...Jesus is Lord!

So, by faith, I declare it. This has nothing to do with how I feel...it is a fact!

Then notice – Paul makes an importantly statement: *This free gift is for anyone and everyone who believes!*

¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

“Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”

This free gift is for everybody!

And also notice...it says whoever believes won’t be put to shame!

This is from Isaiah 28. But also, notice what Psalm 25 says:

Psalm 25

¹ *In you, LORD my God,
I put my trust.*

² *I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

³ *No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.*

Those who place their trust in Jesus Christ are never left wanting.

And then Paul says:

¹² *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Everyone means everyone! This free gift is not only for Israel with all their Jewish traditions...it is for the whole world!

For God so loved the world....

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This is right out of Joel

Joel 2:32

³² *And everyone who calls
on the name of the LORD will be saved;
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the LORD has said,
even among the survivors
whom the LORD calls.*

Tonight, we pick it up at v19, and perhaps finish chapter 9:

Romans 9:19-33

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As he says in Hosea:

“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people;
and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,”
²⁶ and,

“In the very place where it was said to them,
‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For the Lord will carry out
his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

²⁹ *It is just as Isaiah said previously:*

*“Unless the Lord Almighty
had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.”*

³⁰ *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:*

*“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall,
and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.”*

There is a lot here to unpack. And if you are reading along in your Bible you’ll notice there are a lot of footnotes in tonight’s passage where Paul quotes from the Old Testament prophets.

Let’s start at v19:

¹⁹ *One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?”*

Why would someone say that? Well, if you recall, our last study looked at vv14-18:

¹⁴ *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses,*

*“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*

¹⁶ *It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

Paul is saying in tonight’s text someone may hear this and say:

Well, if God is going to have mercy and compassion on whomever He wants, use whomever He wants for His will, even a pagan Pharaoh...If God is going to do whatever He wants anyway...then why is He making a big deal about what I’m doing or not doing? Why does it even matter what I do?

Good questions, right?

Why not go ahead and bring in predestination to the discussion?
If everyone is predestined to either be a Christian or not, then does it matter what we do?

Let me address the predestination question simply and clearly:
We each have a great destiny in the Lord - if we choose it.

God gives us a choice.
It goes back to the Garden of Eve.

Genesis 3:6

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Guys, that was a choice!

God creates the pathway...does the heavy lifting...lays out a beautiful destiny...and then says “Now, choose.”

Joshua 24:15

¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Choose for yourselves...that has always been the message...

Cain chose to kill his brother Abel, and was banished for it...
Noah chose to obey God and build an ark when it made no sense, and thus was used by God to replenish the world...

Abraham chose to believe God in His promise of a son, even though he was almost 100 years old...

On and on...the idea of God offering an amazing and miraculous destiny...an unbelievable destiny that defies the odds...but giving us the choice

Choosing to believe when it makes no sense...
Choosing to trust when everything in us wants to panic...

And choosing hope when there is no reason for hope!

Romans 4:18

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Simply put: *We partner with God in His miraculous plan for our lives through belief and obedience.*

We must choose belief and obedience.

And so Paul is saying in tonight's text, and has been saying throughout chapter 9:

Israel had the goods! God's chosen race. The lineage...the heritage. The bloodline of Jesus Christ. They had the covenants...the promises...the law was given through them...God used them to bring about the worship in the temple...they had the prophets...the judges...the great people of faith who had gone before us and blazed the trail...

They had even seen the divine glory of God!
Shekinah glory: God's physical and visible presence.

And yet, they relied more on their heritage than on obedience, and many were cut off. Because of stubbornness they were willing to let their destiny dissolve away and instead, the message was given to -and received by – the *Gentiles*...a people who were "not His people"...i.e. not the original chosen race.

And by the way...

Israel had no justification in blaming God for their rebellion.
He gave them a choice.

And besides, who were they...are anyone, for that matter to question God?

²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter

have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

These are references to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 29:16

*¹⁶ You turn things upside down,
as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!
Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,
“You did not make me”?
Can the pot say to the potter,
“You know nothing”?*

Isaiah 45:9-10

*⁹ “Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker,
those who are nothing but potsherds
among the potsherds on the ground.
Does the clay say to the potter,
‘What are you making?’
Does your work say,
‘The potter has no hands’?
¹⁰ Woe to the one who says to a father,
‘What have you begotten?’
or to a mother,
‘What have you brought to birth?’*

Potsherds were broken pieces of pottery laying on the ground.

Broken, rebellious people questioning their Maker...blaming Him for their problems...

What a sad state of affairs. But isn't that a picture of the world we live in today?

But in the case of tonight's text, this is Israel we're talking about...God's chosen people!

And we must remember: *God called Israel His chosen race because He wanted to use them to take the message to the world.*

For God so loved the world that He...

But Israel instead chose to be obstinate and rebellious...puffed up and haughty about their heritage, instead of being humble and usable by God.

In tonight's text Paul says:

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As he says in Hosea:

*“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people;
and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,”*

Look at how the Message puts it:

*I'll call nobodies and make them somebodies;
I'll call the unloved and make them beloved.
In the place where they yelled out, “You're nobody!”
they're calling you “God's living children.”*

Does that resonant with anybody here? Hallelujah!

And now notice in v27, Paul talks about a Remnant:

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

*“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.*

*²⁸ For the Lord will carry out
his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”^[k]*

²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously:

*“Unless the Lord Almighty
had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.”^[l]*

Remnant: a small remaining portion.

In a Biblical sense, it represents a remaining group of faithful ones who were once part of a much larger group.

Where did the rest of the group go? Indeed, where?

Here's the thing about remnants that should encourage us here today:

God works through remnants.

Don't give up!

Later, in Chapter 11 Paul says:

Romans 11:5-6

⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

2 Kings 19:30-31

*³⁰ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah
will take root below and bear fruit above.*

*³¹ For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,
and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors.*

"The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Get that – God's zeal! Not our zeal!

Guys – God doesn't count heads – He calls names!

This isn't about a census or membership to some club because of your heritage...God is looking for those who will respond with obedience!

And lastly, look at vv31-33

³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:

*"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall,*

and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

The stumbled over the stumbling stone...wow!

Who is the stumbling stone? Jesus!

John 1:11-13

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

This idea of a Messiah who would come and be crucified was a stumbling stone they couldn't get around.

He was right there in front of them, but instead of believing and receiving Him, they stumbled over Him.

I like how the Message version puts it at the end of Romans 9:

*Careful! I've put a huge stone on the road to Mount Zion,
a stone you can't get around.
But the stone is me! If you're looking for me,
you'll find me on the way, not in the way.*

s in v14

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

What is that about? Well, we left off last week with v13 which says:

¹³ Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

And we discussed that at length. At first it seems like a contradiction because we know God is love. But as we learned, God wasn’t saying He hated Esau as we know the word hate.

Indeed, God is love. But He is also holy. So, this idea of hating indicates an *aversion* to, or *repulsion* of something...it was about Esau’s sin and rebellion. So in this case, the idea of accepting one brother and hating another could be better understood as prefer one over the other because of their heart.

And Paul was tying this in with what he was saying in Chapter 9 - that the Israelites had no more right to assume they were God’s children simply because of their physical genetics than Esau did.

It was all about God’s promise and the belief in that promise.

And now in v14, Paul says:

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

i.e. *God can choose to accept or reject as He wants!* He is God, right?!

¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

*“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”*

This is in reference to an encounter Moses had with God before leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Let’s take a look at it:

Exodus 33:12-19

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴ The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

¹⁸ Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

¹⁹ And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

And earlier in the chapter we see God saying this about Himself:

Exodus 34:6

⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness

Guys: *It is God’s decision to reveal Himself as compassionate.*

We talked about this scene a little on Sunday. We said:

God is moved by our suffering.

Exodus 3:7

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”

He heard their cries of suffering...had compassion on them...had a miraculous plan of deliverance...

Guys: It is the same for us – *God knows the miracle He has for us – yet He still feels compassion for us now in our struggle.*

This is straight from the heart of God! He sees your condition...He knows your hurt...He has a plan, He is working it out...yet, He has compassion for you now and feels your hurt.

That’s what compassion literally means: **Compassion: *to suffer together.*
God hurts when we hurt.**

He is a compassionate God and is close to us when are hurting.

Psalm 34:18

*¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

**Instead of lectures, we get compassion.
Instead of I told you so's, we get compassion
Instead of punishment, we get compassion!**

David got it:

Psalm 103:1-4

*¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion*

He crowns us with love and compassion – instead of *hitting* us over the head,

**He *crowns* our head with the sparkling jewels of His love and compassion –
His mercy.**

**And out of His compassion, He hears us when we call. He answers prayer, and
has prepared our miracle for us!**

Exodus 22:27

²⁷ ...When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

***God has heard your prayers! He has already gone ahead of you and
prepared your breakthrough. And all the while, He feels your hurt and has
compassion on you!***

OK, awesome! Right? So what do you do with this kind of compassion?

Well, simply receive it: *Don't fight God's compassion and try to talk Him out of it!*

That's why God says in **Exodus 33:19**

¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Believe it, receive it, and then act on it!

Paul goes on in v16:

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

So remember the full context of what Paul is saying in chapter 9. It has nothing to do with our human genetics, or our efforts...God has a miraculous work to do in our lives and He does it because of His own character.

When we get that, we can relax and stop trying to earn it!

Compassion: suffering with us...feeling our pain.

And let's talk about mercy for a minute:

Mercy: God choosing to not give us what our sins deserve!

David also said in Psalm 103:

⁹ He will not always accuse,

nor will he harbor his anger forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve

or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,

so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him

God choosing to not accuse us...choosing to not be angry at us...choosing to not treat us as our sins deserve...but instead choosing to reveal Himself as a God who loves immeasurably...a God who has compassion on His children!

And it has nothing to do with our human desire or effort!

Then, in v17 Paul says:

¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Now he brings Pharaoh into the discussion. Why? Pharaoh wasn’t even a believer!

Remember, God can do whatever He wants...and He can use whatever means necessary to carry out His will.

Let’s look at Pharaoh for a minute:

Exodus 4:21

²¹ The LORD said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

And later:

Exodus 7:3-5

³ But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. ⁵ And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.”

Did it happen like God said? Let’s join the story after the plague of the frogs...Exodus 8:8-15

⁸ Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, “I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile.”

¹⁰ “Tomorrow,” Pharaoh said.

Moses replied, “It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God. ¹¹ The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people; they will remain only in the Nile.”

¹² After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the LORD about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. ¹³ And the LORD did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. ¹⁴ They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them. ¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

Let's repeat those last 4 words together... just as the LORD had said.

Notice in tonight's text Paul says God raised Pharaoh up for this purpose:

¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

So indeed, ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

The same heat that melts butter also hardens clay.

What does that mean? Harden? God harden Pharaoh's heart...

I believe it means *To give us over to our stubbornness.*

That should scare us to death!

Paul said way back in Romans 1:24-25

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

We must remember...God is in control, and He will not be mocked.

Everything He does is to carry out His purpose. *that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth*

¹ I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my

people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

God's Sovereign Choice

⁶ It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

We'll stop here. That will be quite enough to unpack in one study.

It helps to remember when Paul wrote this, it was a letter to the Roman church. It didn't have chapter breaks and verse numbers. This was a continuation of his previous point, which was:

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So when you look at it in context, his opening statement in tonight's text is saying:

So yes, God's love is inseparable from us, and it's amazing. I am so blessed and thankful for it. But at the same time...I have to be honest and say that I still carry a great sorrow. I am serious about this, and I'm not exaggerating...with God as my witness...I am very concerned about the Israelites.

And look at v3...

³ *For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,*

He is saying he would be willing sacrifice his own salvation if it meant the salvation of Israel. That's pretty serious. That's how much he loves his nation. They are his own family.

And I thought “*wow, that's pretty extreme there...I mean sacrifice his own salvation? God would never ask him to do that!*” But then I thought, what am I willing to sacrifice for my family's salvation? Am I will to sacrifice my time? My schedule? My money? How about my reputation? I mean, am I willing to sacrifice embarrassment, ridicule, and even scorn by my family by continuing to pray for them and share the love of Christ?

Good questions...

I want to just say this again: *God never told you to stop praying for your unsaved loved ones.*

Paul goes on in v4:

⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

God's Sovereign Choice

Israel had the goods! God's chosen race. The lineage...the heritage. The bloodline of Jesus Christ. They had the covenants...the promises...the law was given through them...God used them to bring about the worship in the temple...they had the prophets...the judges...the great people of faith who had gone before us and blazed the trail...

But also notice, v4 says they had *the divine glory*

There is a word that doesn't appear in the Old Testament, but was used by the early believers to describe God's physical and visible presence:

Shekinah glory: God's physical and visible presence.

Also described as: *the brilliant light of the divine.*

Have you ever experienced the presence of God in a powerful way? I mean where His presence is so heavy you can almost touch Him...you feel it...your emotions are overwhelmed...all of your senses are heightened.

As powerful as that is...you didn't see Him or a physical manifestation of His presence. Can you imagine seeing a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night leading you? Can you imagine a burning bush speaking to you? Can you imagine seeing the Holy Spirit taking the form of a dove and descending from heaven while a loud voice says "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased"?

The Israelites had seen the shekinah glory of God.

They had seen manifestations that nobody else had. God made Himself real to them in a more manifest way than He had with anyone else. Yet, we know of their rebellion and stubbornness that brought on calamity. What happened?

Paul says in v6:

⁶It is not as though God's word had failed.

i.e. Don't blame God for all the problems. *God's Word is true. It is mankind who brings the failure.*

Romans 3:4 says:

⁴Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar.

i.e. *Don't assume for a minute it was God's Word that failed in some way.*

But people still think that way, don't they?

God failed me. His promises aren't true for me...

It's fashionable these days to point out that God's Word has inconsistencies...after all, it was canonized by man, right? *So how do we know God's Word is even true?*

We could take the time and look at the evidence for the Bible in several forms. Physical evidence by way of multiple copies of manuscripts found throughout history – these manuscripts show that the Bible has been translated accurately. We

could look at New Testament records and see that they are incredibly accurate. There are minor differences in manuscripts, called variants, but none of these variants impact or change key Christian beliefs or claims.

We could look at archaeological discoveries. The Archaeological Study Bible is full of examples of how archaeology has proven over and over that the Bible is historically accurate.

We could look at the internal consistency of the Bible, written by 40 authors spanning thousands of years...yet the message and doctrine is consistent.

But more than all that, I want to present an even more convincing argument:

*I know that God is real because He lives in me.
I know how He has changed my life...I know His power...I have experienced His love...I have seen His miracles, starting with my own life...*

So if He is real, then He is indeed God. And what He says is true. And what does He say about His Word?

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

So again, if there is a disconnect or a fail, it is not on God's part, it is not His word that failed...it is always on mankind's part.

Then Paul continues in v6:

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

In other words...It is not human reproduction that makes us God's children, but belief in the promise of God.

It was promise-driven, not human genetics-driven.

The promise given to Sarah and Abraham, by God.

Guys, the heritage of the descendants of Abraham was not made *lasting* and *great* because of human genetics – but instead it was the *promise of God*, believed by Abraham and fulfilled by God!

John talked about this in **John 1:11-13**

¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

It's the same thing Paul is saying here about the Israelites.

They had relied on their family line, as if that was what saved them.

But God, who knows the hearts of man, determines by His promise, and those who believe the promise, who are His children.

The Paul goes from Sarah and brings Rebekah into the discussion:

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

OK, this is a tough one. First, let's go back to the Old Testament reference here:

Malachi 1:2-3

² “I have loved you,” says the LORD.

“But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

“Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

In this reference Israel was doubting God's love. And this is a very interesting answer from God, which, at first glance seems to go against God's character.

And that character trait is: *God is love.*

1 John 4:8

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

So if God is love, how can He hate anyone?

Critics of the Bible love to point out apparent inconsistencies like this.

And we might also struggle with this if we don't take the scripture in context.

Without going into a great detail, Rebekah is considered the second matriarch of the Bible after Sarah. She was the wife of Isaac, Abraham's and Sarah's son. She gave birth to twins, Jacob and Esau. Both of them were in the bloodline. However, as the story goes, Jacob was accepted by God and Esau wasn't. Jacob's name was changed to Israel and from him came the 12 tribes of Israel. Esau was rejected by God because he disregarded God's law, he didn't respect his birthright, and sold it for a bowl of stew. He also married women outside of Israel.

So it became God's plan to exclude Esau from the lineage that would lead to Jesus Christ.

Esau was rejected because of his rebellion.

Meanwhile, God chose his brother Jacob. Why? Because Jacob was perfect? He was far from perfect, and quite the con artist. But his heart, though flawed, was turned toward God.

Isn't that what God expects from us? Does He expect us to be perfect? He knows we aren't. But He judges the heart...He knows our desire to serve Him.

And another thing we need to remember...God doesn't do anything the way we do it. His ways are above our ways.

We are told to love each other, and not hate.

So when it says God hated something or someone, it has a different meaning. Especially in the way the original language translation breaks down the idea of hate as we know it.

For instance: We know God hates sin.

But again, God is love. So, this idea of hating sin indicates an *aversion* to, or *repulsion* of it...He can't be near it because He is holy. He knows what sin does to us, so He commands us to pursue holiness. At the same time He knows we can't be holy ourselves. So He helps us in the pursuit. Make sense?

In this case, the idea of accepting one brother and hating another could be better understood as prefer one over the other because of their heart.

So now, back to the text tonight in Romans 9:

Paul is saying the Israelites have no more right to assume they are God's children simply because of their physical genetics than Esau did.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

OK, powerful section of scripture. Let’s dive right in...

First of all, notice v31

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things?

What are “these things”?

Paul previously laid out a wonderful plan...

We as believers are called to walk by faith in the hope we have, and not by sight of what we see now. We have a glorious hope of perfect redemption. As we wait for it, there will be times of weakness...times of struggle...times of setback...we don’t understand what’s happening...perhaps we are desperate for relief...but instead of taking matters into our own hands we submit to the Spirit, who understands all things...He understands our hearts...He understands what is happening both in the seen world as well as the unseen...He sees all and knows all...when we don’t know how to pray, we can

pray in the Spirit and we know that His wordless groans will be in exact accordance with God's will!

And now, in response to these things, we can say...

If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is stated as a rhetorical question...it is the same meaning as saying:

Since God is for us, who can be against us?

i.e. With God on our side like this, we can't lose!

What a statement! Wishful thinking?

Remember the powerful statement made in v28:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

In all things God is working for our good.

Not some...all! And if He is working for our good, then He is "for us"!

It just stands to reason!

Then Paul backs up His statement:

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

He made the ultimate sacrifice...giving His own Son. What more does God have to do to show He is on our side?

And therefore...

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one.

Remember, Romans 8 starts out with:

Romans 8:1-2

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

We are not condemned, because Jesus was condemned in our place!

And this was God's choice for it to be like this!

He is the One who did this...He is the one who justifies...

The One most qualified to condemn us, doesn't!

Why? Because He loves us!

But pastor, I deserve condemnation. I don't deserve this kind of grace...with all I've done! I thought God was a perfect and just God?! He just let me get away with it?

No...not at all!

God is indeed just...and no sin goes unpunished...but we must get this...God chose to put the punishment on His own Son, once and for all!

God did this...it was His choice!

He chose us...He loved us...He did all this for us...And He justifies us!

And with all that being said...who is left to condemn us?

Who can bring any charges against us?

So I ask that of you...do we still feel condemned at times? Are there charges leveled against us? Who does it?

It gets back to the Unholy Trinity: Satan, the world (others), and the flesh.

When we are feeling condemned, we can be assured it is not from God. It is either from Satan, ourselves, or others.

Revelation 12:10

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

***"Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Messiah.***

***For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,***

Paul goes on in v34:

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Jesus Christ, who took our condemnation on the cross...who broke the curse of sin and death when He rose from the grave...is now at the right hand of the Father advocating for us! Can you imagine the scene? Like a courtroom!

What great love! Amazing love! What grace! Amazing grace! With all this in mind, Paul makes another rhetorical statement:

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

i.e. because we belong to Him, we can count on a constant battle from all sides. We have an enemy out to get us. We have a big target on us?

Do you ever feel like that?

But take heart:

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

We are not just conquerors...we are more than conquerors...conquerors and then some.

God doesn't just intend for us to “eek” our way through life and barely make it! We will conquer! We will be victorious to the point of actually being better off for the struggle!

I am not a recovering alcoholic barely making it through the day without drinking! I am victorious over it! It has no hold on me? I don't have to avoid the conversation...I can boldly tell other of what God did for me. I can get right down in the pit with others who struggle with it and help them...why? Because I am more than a conqueror!

Not just conquerors...*More* than conquerors.

This is a biblical concept woven through the OT and NT.

Isaiah 61:7

*⁷ Instead of your shame
you will receive a double portion,
and instead of disgrace
you will rejoice in your inheritance.
And so you will inherit a double portion in your land,
and everlasting joy will be yours.*

Isaiah 54:17

*¹⁷ no weapon forged against you will prevail,
and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
and this is their vindication from me,”*

God says this is our heritage...our birthright! If God is for us, who can be against us?

And then Paul explains the reason for his position:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**I want to stop and ask: Are you convinced?
Do you know it deep inside?**

Paul said this of Abraham earlier in Romans:

Romans 4:18-21

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Hoping against hope...against the odds...believing when it makes no sense...without weakening in his faith he faced the physical reality of his situation...yet did not waiver...why?

²¹ *being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

Fully persuaded...convinced...knowing in his heart of hearts...

What gives us that audacity?

that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from God's love! Nothing!

I mean look at the parameters mentioned here...

neither angels nor demons (even the supernatural), neither the present nor the future (God holds time in His hands...He is not bound by it), nor any powers, (no power in this world...not culture...not the changing times...not the media...not the government...not even a worldwide pandemic) ³⁹neither height nor depth (no physical dimension...and then, just in case he missed something...for good measure...) , nor anything else in all creation

Nothing can separate us from God's love! Nothing!

And that love is fully displayed in Christ Jesus our Lord!

¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the*

firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

We'll start unpacking at v26:

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Paul starts out with: *In the same way*

So it would be fitting to go back and see what that "same way" is:

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

We went over this last week. What a beautiful and awesome promise. Paul is saying both we and the physical earth groan in anticipation of what will be. My deliverer is coming!

We wait in hope of God's fulfilled promise. We are saved by this hope! Not only saved on the day of our salvation, but saved each time we choose to keep going when our struggle wants us to quit!

Each time we continue to pray in faith even though we haven't gotten the answer yet.

And meanwhile, we walk by faith and not by sight. After all...But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

We talked about some ways we “hope in what is seen”

So Paul continues with:

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

This is deep. It is basically saying:

We as believers are called to walk by faith in the hope we have, and not by sight of what we see now. We have a glorious hope of perfect redemption. As we wait for it, there will be times of weakness...times of struggle...times of setback...we don’t understand what’s happening...perhaps we are desperate for relief...but instead of taking matters into our own hands we submit to the Spirit, who understands all things...He understands our hearts...He understands what is happening both in the seen world as well as the unseen...He sees all and knows all...when we don’t know how to pray, we can pray in the Spirit and we know that His wordless groans will be in exact accordance with God’s will!

Praying in the Spirit means praying God’s will!

It hits the nail right on the head! It fills us with God’s presence.

Question: *Do you pray in the Spirit?*

Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

Jude 20

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

What does praying in the Spirit mean?

First of all, ***It means allowing ourselves to be filled with the Spirit.***

It means emptying ourselves...***how do we empty ourselves?***

We are emptied by being filled.

(water glass) Is this glass really empty?

In order to truly heal and move forward, the things of the world and the flesh need to be flushed out and we need to be refilled.

Filled with what? Filled with the things of God...His presence, His Word, filled with the Spirit!

Think of the sail of a sailboat (show pic):

Sail must be continuously filled with wind to drive the boat

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The Greek word is plerousthe

Present imperative verb meaning “*constantly being filled, or keep being filled*”

Can we all say “*Lord, fill my sails today*”

That’s what we’re talking about...being emptied by being continuously filled. Getting out of our own heads...*We can’t be in our heads and in God’s presence at the same time.*

Let’s look at Ezekiel 36:25-28

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

First of all: Notice all the “I’s”

Nowhere does God say “I expect you to....”

He does it...and He *wants* to do it...we need to simply ask.

God will fill us with His Spirit when we empty ourselves and ask.

And get this...***As God fills us, we become who we were created to be!***

So, we could paraphrase the scripture in Ezekiel 36 as God saying:

“I will fill you up with My Living Water, flushing out the impurities, shame, fear, and other things that are holding you back. As I fill you, your cold and hardened heart will give way to a new heart that is living and vibrant, the real heart I originally gave you. I will fill you with My Spirit and you will be empowered to live by My Words of life. You will thrive as I intended. You will be mine and I will be yours.”

"I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

DL Moody

And with that emptying of ourselves and being filled with His presence, We allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us in a language we don't understand.

Some call it our “prayer language”

It is the gift of tongues, a gift God gives to those who seek Him, wanting to communicate with Him on a deeper level than normal conversation.

(Lovers Point)

It is a beautiful thing...it is a personal thing. It is you and the Holy Spirit...

"May not a single moment of my life be spent outside the light, love and joy of God's presence and not a moment without the entire surrender of myself as a vessel for Him to fill full of His Spirit and His love."

Andrew Murray.

And then Paul says the famous words we know in v28:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Notice the first three words...*for we know*...

Let's just stop and let that settle in for a moment...*for we know*...do we know? I mean really know...in our heart of hearts?

Jesus said something similar:

John 8:32

³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Then you will "know"...notice it doesn't say "hear"

It's in the knowing...when we put all our chips in...when we place our faith completely in it...that's where the change occurs.

"Knowing" happens when information becomes transformation.

OK...so we "know"...know what?

in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

And notice it says "all things" not some things...

You take what the enemy meant for evil, and You turn it for good...

But remember...Romans 8 is not a bunch of random thoughts grouped together...it is all building to a point.

We like to reduce it to: *All things work together for the good.*

Sending good vibes...good thoughts...it's all good...(Manifest TV Show)

No...the full context of Romans 8:28 is:

For those who realize they are no longer obligated to the flesh, who have chosen to *crucify* the flesh...for those who have committed to live by the Spirit and be *filled with* and *led* by the Spirit...for those who realize we have an awesome promise that we will be glorified like Jesus someday, and therefore the hardships of this life don't compare...and because of this hope...we will not give in to fear, discouragement, and doubt...we will remain hopeful and strong... For those who wait for it, knowing there will be times of weakness...times of struggle...times of setback...we don't understand what's happening...perhaps we are desperate for relief...but instead of taking matters into our own hands we *submit* to the Spirit, who understands all things...He understands our hearts...He understands what is happening both in the seen world as well as the unseen...He sees all and knows all...when we don't know how to pray, we can pray in the Spirit and we know that His wordless groans will be in exact accordance with God's will...and that is what we want...God's will!

That, my friends, is how we position ourselves to “know” that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Amen?

Paul then finishes the thought:

²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Expand on.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

There's no comparison between the hard times we are going through now vs the glorious time coming. *Can we say that? Is it true?*

I believe it is more important now than ever to remember this!

Nothing on this earth compares with the eternal promise we have.

But it's even better than that. Look at v19:

¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

**Have you ever noticed this? *for the children of God to be revealed.*
What does that mean?**

God's glory will soon be revealed to us and in us!

1 John 3:1-2

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Get that! *But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

**Can you only imagine?! *God's glory will soon be revealed to us and in us!*
And notice in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul talks about our earthly and heavenly bodies.**

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise God! We have to get this, what a glorious time this will be!

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

There is nothing that will glorify God like the perishable becoming imperishable!

Indeed: ***God’s glory will soon be revealed to us and in us!***

Now, in v20, Paul brings his attention to the earth.

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

OK, this gets a little deeper. This is saying that God, the Creator is holding back the earth from what it will be, just like He is holding us back for the day we will be glorified. And by the way, did you notice it says He subjects it in hope?

The devil sure doesn’t subject anything with hope! And the flesh? Are you kidding? What is the result when we wait in the flesh? Worry, anxiety...

God is the only one who can do that! It is the same way for us...

They that wait on the Lord...they that Hope in the Lord...

Hope...hope for what? What can the actual earth hope for?

²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Really? The earth will be liberated from bondage and brought into the same freedom and glory that we as God's children will be?

Let's look at end times prophecy, and jump to the end of the 7 year tribulation. A bullet point summary from this point on:

At the end of the 7-year tribulation, Jesus will come in power along with the armies of heaven.

Jude 14,15, Matthew 24:29-31

Jesus will save Jerusalem from destruction and defeat the vast armies of the Anti-Christ in the Battle of Armageddon. At this time, everyone will know He is King. He will reign on earth for a thousand years.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, Revelation 16:16-19

The Anti-Christ and the False Prophet will be defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Revelation 19:11-21

Jesus will judge the followers of the Anti-Christ and False Prophet.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46

Satan will be bound for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:1-3

Jesus will rule the earth during this Millennium. It will be a time of peace and prosperity. The temple in Jerusalem will be restored. We will reign with Jesus.

Revelation 20:6

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released for a short time. He will deceive many. But he will be defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Revelation 20:7-10

Every unbeliever from the past will be resurrected. They, together with every unbeliever present, will be brought to the Throne of Judgment. The verdicts will be read and they will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

Revelation 20:11-15

Hell will not be full of people God has rejected – it will be full of people who rejected God!

A new heaven and earth will be created. We will spend eternity in paradise in the presence of God!

Revelation 21:1-5

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

What do we do with this? What is a good response?

Simply put...be ready!

Jesus said in **Luke 21:36**

³⁶ *Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.*

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Watch and pray! Purify yourself, and be ready!

The Message Version puts it this way:

The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

Back to Romans 8, Paul continues in v22:

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Now Paul is saying both we and the physical earth groan in anticipation of what will be. *My deliverer is coming!*

We wait in hope of God's fulfilled promise. We are saved by this hope! Not only saved on the day of our salvation, but saved each time we choose to keep going when our struggle wants us to quit!

Each time we continue to pray in faith even though we haven't gotten the answer yet.

And meanwhile, we walk by faith and not by sight. After all...*But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?*

What are some ways we "hope in what is seen"?

We are called to put faith in action as we wait for our day of glory.

Faith in action...that's what we're talking about.

Hebrews 11:1

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Confidence in the hope of God's promise of glory...the assurance that He always does what He promises...

And with that...we wait patiently.

Psalm 27:13-14

¹³ I remain confident of this:

*I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;

*be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.*

And 1 John 3:3 says

³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

We'll continue next week with v26 and finish this section.

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Some highlights from last week’s study of vv1-13:

We are free from condemnation because Jesus has set us free!

Hallelujah! OK, set us free from what? From the law of sin and death.

It is no longer about us gritting our teeth and trying hard to keep the law. It is about putting our faith in the One who completed the work - once and for all!

If we are feeling condemned, we can categorically rest assured it is not from God!

The law was a band aid fix, instead of a permanent fix that brings healing. Jesus Christ is that permanent fix!

We are not condemned - because Jesus was condemned for us!

And then Paul said, a reasonable response to this is to:

Then we live as those who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit - learning a new lifestyle.

Walking in the Spirit...being led by the Spirit...it is a whole new way of living...it indicates a change from the old way...a change in how we act...a change in how we *react*...and then Paul gives a real-life example of one of the most important ways we should be displaying change:

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

Paul reminds us of our heritage...we are children of God! That is who we are!

Therefore...therefore what? He brings us *fear* of all things.

Fear: Much has been said about fear

Fear is at the heart of just about every negative emotion

God has a lot to say about fear and discouragement

He says over and over “fear not” be of good courage”

He knows how we are wired, and our tendency to give in to the crashing of the waves around us. *He also knows how fear hurts us:*

Fear will stifle our dreams

Fear will stunt our growth

Fear will keep us from reaching our potential and our destiny

Fear will hinder our ability to obey God

Fear will rob us of joy in relationships and freedom in Christ

Fear will freeze us, frustrate us, and strangle us

And fear will definitely keep us from stepping out into what God has for us.

But in the context of tonight’s study, I want to present this idea about fear:

Fear - The DNA blocker.

What do I mean by that? *Fear makes us forget who we are!*

Paul had laid out God’s wonderful plan of sending Jesus to take the condemnation that we deserved. He came to fulfill the law we could never keep.

Then he reminds us that we are children of God, led by the Spirit.

Then he says: . ¹⁵ *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again*

This tells me three things:

God does not bring on anything that will make us slaves.

Quite the opposite!

Galatians 5:1

¹ *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

There it is...freedom, not slavery!

And that leads to the second thing: *God does not give us fear.*

Fear is not from God – period!

I'll prove it:

First of all: *God is love.*

1 John 4:8

⁸ *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

God is love. Everything He does....

Next point:

There is no fear in love.

1 John 4:18

¹⁸ *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

Based on this, it's safe to say:

Fear and love are not compatible. Therefore:

There is no God in fear – there is no fear in God.

And if God's not in it...why would we want to touch it?!

But we do, don't we? We touch it, we have our hands all over it. In fact, we let it move it.

Why? **Because it is more in line with how we see ourselves.**

Guys: *Fear is a learned response.*

*It is based on experience

I believe this is why we are more familiar and even comfortable with fear and oppression than with feeling free with love.

People and life have hurt us and let us down, that's a fact, that's what we know

That's comfortable and predictable...you can work around it, put up your walls and move on in life, right?

Fear holds us back from being who we truly are. We don't even notice this because it is so habitual. **Fear keeps us from being our true selves, whereas:**

Love helps us find our true selves.

And also, notice Romans 8:15 says: ¹⁵ *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again*

Notice it says again. That tells me we once were slaves to fear. But not we are not anymore...in a spiritual sense, of course.

Therefore: When we give in to fear, we are going backward in faith.

So what's the solution? Remember who you are and Whose you are!

V15 continues:

rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Abba (show pic): Aramaic for "Daddy"

It was a common term that young children would use to address their fathers. It signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father to his child, as well as the childlike trust that a young child puts in his “daddy.”

And if that’s not enough, God knows we have a hard time grasping and remembering this – so His spirit reminds us:

Galatians 4:6

⁶And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”

Get that – *prompting us to call out! Encouraging us! Calling us!*

We must understand - as hard as this is for us to grasp....I mean...Maker of Heaven and Earth....the Alpha and Omega....El Shaddai, God Almighty...the All Sufficient One...

And this is how He *chooses* to relate to us!

God not only allows me to call Him Abba, but He encourages it!

But it’s even better than that. ***God wants us to identify with this!***

John 1:10-13 The Message

*He came to his own people,
but they didn’t want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves*

“My dignity as Abba’s child is my most coherent sense of self”

Brennan Manning

1 John 3:1

3 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Are we getting it? I mean really getting it? Because I believe when you can grasp this concept, you will have a better concept of God's love...and understand that fear has no place in it!

The all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present God, Holy, pure, and perfect....and He wants us in our brokenness to call Him *Abba – Daddy!*

That's our Abba, and it smacks right in the face of fear!

So here's a thought:

Because of God's grace, we are approved by Him - not by our own merit, but because of His favor. And because He favors us, He invites us into an "Abba-Child" relationship.

Paul confirms that as he finishes this section in Romans 8:

¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

And notice, in v8 of tonight's text in Romans, he says:

⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

It is similar to what he said in v5 of Chapter 7

⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.

“The realm of the flesh” What does that mean?

Another way of saying it is “*The way we lived the old life.*”

When we were living in the flesh, trapped by sin.

We are not to live like that anymore! Amen?

Paul goes on in v9:

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (The opposite is true, too)

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

VV10-11 address our condition as mortal beings.

If we die before Jesus' second coming, we believers will be immediately spiritually united with Jesus in paradise, or the *third* heaven (1st heaven is our sky, 2nd is the cosmos). Our earthly body stays earthly and decays, or is cremated. There is no holding place, or temporary waiting period.

Jesus clearly indicates this when he said to the thief on the cross:

Luke 23:43

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

And 2 Corinthians 5 says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

But we also know that though our earthly bodies decay and perish, we will have imperishable bodies in heaven.

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

And Paul devotes a lot of time in 1 Corinthians 15 talking about our earthly and heavenly bodies. But I will direct you specifically to vv50-57:

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at how he wraps up the whole matter, even tying the law back into it.

We said this last Sunday:

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience - we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

We are spirit, we have a soul, and we live in a body.

With this in mind, we realize we are no longer in the realm of the flesh...now or in eternity.

This should change how we view our fleshly struggles!

Because of Jesus Christ, this is not me anymore!

Act accordingly...

That is what Paul is saying in vv12-13:

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

I will save the rest of this section for next week...

This whole chapter is about the relationship between the sinfulness of mankind and God's law. Some of the language used by Paul suggests that some in the Roman church might have assumed that he was saying the law was sinful since we now have freedom from the law. He is careful to correct that thinking by stating that the law still has great purpose – without it, we wouldn't know sin is sin.

Tonight, we'll continue in this chapter, where Paul is describing his own personal struggles with his flesh:

Romans 7:14-25

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

This is one of the toughest sections of scripture in the Bible. I will try my best to explain it how I see it, based on the Greek tense used by Paul, and comparing it to his other epistles. The views I will be expressing are consistent with our denomination and many Biblical scholars. In the time we have tonight, I will stay on this track. It would be very easy to go in different

directions with this discussion. But there are other viewpoints on this scripture too. Specifically, the viewpoint that this Chapter was about Paul before his conversation.

So let's unpack this:

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

The law is spiritual because it is God's law, and God is spirit.

Jesus said:

John 4:24

²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Show diagram:

Our regenerated spirit is the part of us that naturally wants to worship God.

Unfortunately, we have these other parts of us that aren't wired the same way. (the body and the soul...flesh)

So, we are told to learn to get control of these:

Romans 8:12-13

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Notice that...it addresses the body and the mind. Both are where the flesh resides. (show diagram)

Our flesh – the old nature – the sinful nature...the part of us we are told over and over to learn to control.

We are no longer obligated to the flesh, but it still exists.

And I believe that is what Paul is saying in v14, and the rest of this chapter.

In my spirit man, I want to please God. But this mind of mine...this body of mine...they are *unspiritual*...it was born in sin and still wants to call the shots.

In fact, look how the Amplified Version shows v14:

The Conflict of Two Natures

¹⁴ We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am a creature of the flesh [worldly, self-reliant—carnal and unspiritual], sold into slavery to sin [and serving under its control].

Notice he starts out with “we”. We...the church...*we* know that the law is God’s law...then he changes pronouns and makes it personal...I...I can speak for me...I still have to get control of this beast...and also notice it says “*I am*”...this is an ongoing struggle. i.e.

And then Paul goes on to describe this inner war by saying the same thing over and over, even using hyperbole...

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

In each one of these statements, he is using the “I” and “me” pronouns. This is personal.

i.e. I realize I have nothing, in and of myself. I keep blowing it. In my spirit man, I want to please God. But my own sinful nature is right there causing me to do what my spirit man doesn't want to do. There is a constant conflict and tension.

Can anyone associate with that? How many times have we thought we were over some behavior or attitude? Then struggle occurs...the heat of argument with our spouse...a setback at work...bad news comes in...someone deeply hurts us...and it's right there, raising its ugly head.

This is a conflict that shouldn't surprise us...it will be there until we see Jesus.

Our task is to understand and be aware of this tension, and have a plan for it.

And that plan is to learn to walk in the Spirit, and not the flesh.

Galatians 5:16-17

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Remember, this was written to believers...not the world.

We must be aware of these tendencies still in us, and learn to crucify them.

Walking in the Spirit -(that means) learning a new lifestyle.

John wrote about this in his first epistle:

1 John 1:5-10

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all^l sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

This is the same idea. If we, as believers, claim we are God’s children, then it should show in our changing lifestyle.

I asked recently: *Does your life show on the outside that you have changed on the inside?*

And this idea of “walking in the darkness” is the same as Paul’s phrase “walking in the flesh”. It isn’t about being perfect and never blowing it. John addressed that in v8

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Instead, it is talking about a *lifestyle* of sinning...continuing to sin without it bothering us...continuing to give in the flesh...

In Church of God speak, we call it learning to live a sanctified life.

Bottom line: *Becoming a Christian gives us power over sin, but it doesn’t automatically make us sinless.*

That is something we must walk out. And that is what we strive for...that is part of pursuing a sanctified life.

John said this in Chapter 2 of 1st John:

1 John 2:1-2

¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

And that last part is the shining light of all this: *What is our hope in all this mess, in this constant tension we live in?* Jesus Christ!

So another way of saying it is: *We are saved, and we are being saved.*

Paul wraps it all up by saying:

²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So

then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

That is our hope!

Lynn Stone said:

In the Greek language the word “ego” is the primary pronoun of the first person which is translated “I” or “me”. This is the personal pronoun that is used by Jesus so often in the Gospel of John when He says, “I am”. So the word itself is certainly not bad or negative within itself.

But beginning in v14 of the 7th chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul suddenly switches from the unemphasized personal pronoun “we” to the personal and emphatic pronoun “I”. He says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I (ego) am carnal, sold under sin”. In this passage of Scripture Paul uses “ego” in a very selfish manner. That is, the entire passage refers to the attempt of the “ego” self to try to live according to the law without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Message Version of vv24-25:

²⁴ *I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question?*

²⁵ *The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.*

Paul describes the failures of his best intentions to do good, yet still doing sinful things. He then cries out in frustration, calling himself a wretched man. He asks “who will deliver me?!” He then concludes by thanking God through Jesus Christ our Lord that he has that deliverance only through faith in Christ.

⁷ What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ¹³ Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

There is a lot here. Let's try to unpack it:

⁷ What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful?

Paul is addressing a comment someone might make after his statements earlier in the chapter about being dead to the law. I mean, *hay...if the*

law isn't all that useful in terms of setting us free, then maybe it's no better than sin? Good question. And the answer is:

Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

So clearly, the law still has a purpose. While the law cannot set us free, it surely gives us a guide for what is right. Paul states that point when he says without the law, I wouldn't know what sin is.

The law served as a guideline for right and wrong.

It didn't provide any means or power to *do* right...but it at least told us what was right. Then Paul says:

⁸ *But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.*

Sin seized the moment...what does that mean? Is sin a living and breathing thing that can act on something? I believe this is describing a very important concept we need to understand:

The commandment of the law defines an act as sinful. And this arouses our sinful nature.

i.e. Sin awakens our selfish desires.

This plays out in what he says in this section of the flesh (sinful nature).

And then he says *For apart from the law, sin was dead.*

Without the commandment of the law. Sin wouldn't be sin.

It might even lose its luster.

I thought of the young child...we tell them "don't touch that pot, it's hot..."

We are all born into this. It is our sinful nature.

And that part of us...the flesh...it doesn't just go away when we believe. We are told to get control of it, and to learn to not be controlled by it.

Galatians 5:16-17

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Romans 8:12-13

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, (so he is writing to the church...not the world) in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In vv9-10 Paul says:

⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

i.e. once I was young and naïve...then I learned about the law...about right and wrong...and I learned that the very sin that I thought was fun only leads to death.

Romans 6:21-23

²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In v11, Paul almost repeats v8 word for word...

¹¹ *For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.*

So again,
The commandment of the law defines an act as sinful. And this arouses our sinful nature.

And Paul is now saying this arousal only leads to death.

How could our lives change if, when we are tempted, we kept in mind that this thing that sounds good and tempting only leads to death?

So with all this in mind, he says in v12:

¹² *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*

The law is God's law. And being such, it is by nature good, holy, and righteous.

The problem is...we have no way, in and of ourselves, to keep it...and won't this side of heaven.

And here's the dilemma:

¹³ *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*

i.e. was it the law that brought death in my life? Or was it my inability to keep the law that leads to death?

Guys...we need to understand...sin is not a cute and fuzzy thing that we joke about...

Sin tempts us to do what will destroy us!

Sin would love nothing more than for us to live by the old sinful nature. And keep living by that old nature until we are destroyed...

Matthew Henry said:

"The same heat that softens wax, hardens clay. Food or medicine when taken wrong, may cause death, though its nature is to nourish or to heal. The law may cause death through man's depravity, but sin is the poison that brings death. Not

the law, but sin discovered by the law, was made death to the apostle. The ruinous nature of sin, and the sinfulness of the human heart, are here clearly shown.”

There’s that human heart mentioned again...the sarx as we discussed last Wednesday and Sunday...the *flesh* that Paul refers to so often.

We must be aware of what is really happening here, or we become naïve and easy prey.

It is easy to think “this is just how I am”

We must remember the words of God to Cain all the way back in Genesis:

Genesis 4:6-7

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

And it also helps me to remember the definition of this sarx, the flesh, that still resides in me...

It has been defined as:

Our human ability to know, judge, or perceive good and evil.

Again, the key word there is “human”. It is the part of us as humans that tries to make decisions and discern truth from our human standpoint, apart from God. The Bible refers to this as:

Our flesh, old nature, sinful nature.

The sarx is the earthly nature of man that is apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God. It is a product of the fallen state of mankind, and it is tainted by our own hurts and brokenness.

And *being* a product of our fallen state, the sarx will always try to steer us towards what is consistent with our brokenness instead of what is true and pleasing to God.

So what’s the solution? There’s clearly God’s part and our part.

What's our part?

Romans 6:11-12

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Count yourself dead to all this...this involves a choice...a daily choice...

It's time to cut the head off this so it no longer calls the shots in our lives!

Next week, finish Chapter 7

¹ Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? ² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. ³ So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Paul begins by identifying his audience.

for I am speaking to those who know the law

In other words...you know the law, this shouldn't be hard to understand

And then he says:

that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

At face value, this seems like a random and overly-obvious point.

I mean, of course the law only applies to people who are alive, right?

We're not going to dig up a corpse and put it on trial, right?

But Paul is building on a point here. He goes on...

² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. ³ So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

So here Paul is using the analogy of marital obligation...this obligation being released upon the death of one of the spouses. “Til death do us part.”

And now, he makes the tie to the spiritual application:

⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Using the analogy of marriage:

Through Jesus’ death, we have died to the old requirement of rule keeping.

That old way of attaining a sense of spirituality died with Jesus’ death. He has been resurrected and so have we. Therefore, we are free to remarry, as it were. And our new marriage is to a new way of life that actually bears fruit.

Think about it for a moment: The old way was a law whose requirements were unreachable for us as sinners. The law demanded justice. So the vicious cycle began:

Sin – sacrifice – forgiveness – sin – sacrifice – forgiveness.

The law allowed no room to advance out of that cycle because we are not perfect and sinless.

The law would always convict us of our need for sacrifice and atonement.

Under the law, there was no freedom to move forward and bear fruit in our lives.

Paul goes on in v5:

⁵ *For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.*

“The realm of the flesh” What does that mean?

Another way of saying it is “The way we lived the old life”

In fact: The Amplified Version says:

⁵ *When we were living in the flesh [trapped by sin]*

In the realm of the flesh...trapped by it. For more insight on this, we should look at the word Paul used here in the Greek:

⁵ *For when we were in the realm of the flesh,^[a]*

Footnotes

- a. In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

The word *sarx* is Greek, and it appears in the New Testament in several forms.

Sarx, often translated as flesh; sarkikos which means carnal; and sarkinos, fleshy.

It has been defined as:

Our human ability to know, judge, or perceive good and evil.

The key word there is “human”. It is the part of us as humans that tries to make decisions and discern truth from our human standpoint, apart from God. The Bible refers to this as:

Our flesh, old nature, sinful nature.

What are some ways we try to discern truth from a human standpoint?

The sarx is the earthly nature of man that is apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God. It is a product of the fallen state of mankind, and it is tainted by our own hurts and brokenness.

One thing we need to know about this sarx:

The sarx will always steer us wrong!

Being a product of our fallen state, the sarx will always try to steer us towards what is easy and comfortable to the flesh instead of what is pleasing to God.

Galatians 5:16-17

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

That last statement is an important one:

Our flesh is in conflict with the Spirit. It will never steer us toward truth.

So that's what Paul means when he says "realm of the flesh"

Living under the influence of this Sarx. Obeying its voice.

Then Paul says in v6:

⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

In the first part of this verse, Paul is saying:

We no longer have to fear fighting the flesh, because, in a spiritual sense we have died to it.

Remember, earlier in v4:

⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

We died to the old way, so we are no longer bound by it.

And in Chapter 6, Paul said:

Romans 6:11-12

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

We died to the flesh spiritually, so we no longer have to obey it.

So when you break it down this way, doesn't our Christian life come down to walking out in a practical sense what has already happened in a spiritual sense.

To live like we've died...

And in the last part of v6:

we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

New way...I like that. A new way...a better way...the way of the Spirit.

A way of freedom!

I like how the Message Version puts it:

So, my friends, this is something like what has taken place with you. When Christ died he took that entire rule-dominated way of life down with him and left it in the tomb, leaving you free to "marry" a resurrection life and bear "offspring" of faith for God. For as long as we lived that old way of life, doing whatever we felt we could get away with, sin was calling most of the shots as the old law code hemmed us in. And this made us all the more rebellious. In the end, all we had to show for it was miscarriages and stillbirths. But now that we're no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin, and out from under all those oppressive regulations and fine print, we're free to live a new life in the freedom of God.

I'll continue in Chapter 6, where Paul further discusses the idea, introducing the idea of being slaves to righteousness.

(Dewitt?) Romans 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's unpack this:

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!

This is a continuation of the thought presented in v1 of this chapter:

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

These are both rhetorical questions. We do have a tendency to rationalize our behavior at times...

So here, Paul is continuing with the idea...and addressing a thought process that one could have if they were not transformed by grace. So, again...

There is a difference between receiving grace, and letting it transform you.

Paul continues to argue the point:

¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Slaves to righteousness. Why slaves?

Slave: *a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them.*

Get that...property of another.

Question: *To whom do you belong?*

John 1:12-13

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

And jumping ahead to Romans 8, Paul says:

Romans 8:14-16

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

We are literally the property of God, we are His children, and His Spirit is in us.

Paul furthers this idea in his epistle to the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

We are not our own – and we are not on our own.

And getting back to the definition of a slave, notice...*forced to obey them.*

I asked last week:

Do you ever feel like you are a slave to your struggle?

Paul said a few verses earlier in Romans 6:

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. So there it is again...that's straight talk right there! We are no longer obligated to sin. Therefore you don't have to be a slave to it!

So to sum all this up:

We are not made slaves by complete submission to God - we are actually made free by it!

Notice how Jesus put it:

Matthew 10:39

³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Message version:

If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

When we lose ourselves in God, we actually find ourselves.

When we learn how to cut the head off our brokenness, thus taking its voice – when we lose ourselves to God, and listen only to His voice, that's where we find true freedom

It's a paradox the world doesn't understand...*We are only truly free when we are completely dependent on God.*

Let's get back to the text:

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to

righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

In other words, *I'm putting this as simple as I can...I want you to understand, so I am using the analogy of slavery.*

It's real simple: *Hey guys, you once were under the control of sin, and were forced to obey it. Now, you have been freed from that...you are now under the control of the Holy Spirit who is in you. Therefore, with the same sense of obligation – be compelled to obey the call for righteousness.*

Then he makes a humorous statement in v20:

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

Freed from the shackles of righteousness. Does anyone else find that funny?

i.e. you weren't burdened by all this "living right" stuff. You could do what you want, right?

Is that true freedom, by the way?

I would ask: *How did that work out for you?*

Do you see your life before Christ as being easier and happier?

Yikes!

The Bible says God's commands aren't burdensome.

1 John 5:2-3

² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

Question: *Do you think God's commands are a drag?*

Do you enjoy your relationship with the Lord?

Are you still in awe of God's love and grace like you were when you first believed?

Paul hits it head-on when he asks in the next verse:

²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

How did it work out for you?

It resulted in death! See it for what it is!

God doesn't want us looking back longingly at what He freed us from.

Then Paul says:

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

He is drawing a comparison using the same framework of thinking...compared to the old life that you were a slave to...things that all led to death...now you are obligated to a way of living that instead brings peace with God...a way that brings life...life now, but more importantly...eternal life!

Does anything compare to that?!

Paul said to the Philippian church:

Philippians 3:8

⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Then Paul brings it all home in Romans 6 with his famous statement:

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is talking about payoff.

Two different ways of living – each with a different payoff.

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of

righteousness. ¹⁴ *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

If we were to assign a theme to tonight's teaching, it would be "*Dead to sin, alive in Christ.*"

Let's unpack it:

¹ *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*

Why would Paul ask that? Do we have that tendency to rationalize...in the flesh?

Remember, in the previous Chapter, Paul said:

²⁰ *...But where sin increased, grace increased all the more*

So here, Paul is continuing with the idea...and addressing a thought process that one could have if they were not transformed by grace. You see...

There is a difference between receiving grace, and letting it transform you.

When we truly "get" grace...when we understand what has been done to provide this grace...we will love the Lord and want to please Him.

To know God is to love Him. To love Him is to want to obey Him.

John 14:15

¹⁵ *"If you love me, keep my commands.*

Titus 2:11-12

¹¹ *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,*

Ephesians 5:10

¹⁰ *and find out what pleases the Lord.*

Different Books of the Bible...different authors...same message. And that is exactly what Paul is saying here:

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

By no means...certainly not...Of course not...KJV God forbid...

Paul goes on: *We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*

Died to sin...what do you think that means?

Notice it doesn't say "sin is dead in you"

We died to sin...meaning, the obligation to give in to sin has been rendered powerless.

Oh, it's still there...it's not dead...who can attest to that, amen?

It's power over us has been removed by the Blood of Jesus!

Oh, the blood of Jesus...

We are the ones that died, not sin itself in us.

Sounds like I'm splitting hairs, but we need to get this:

Jesus' sacrifice and victory over sin and death bought us a choice.

We have a choice...*Sin does not die in us unless we kill it!*

So when we say we have died to sin means we have killed it in the power and the name of Jesus Christ.

We must continue to kill sin and our old (sin) nature!

Paul said to the Galatian church:

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I...the old self who was obligated to sin...have been crucified...my new life is obligated to please Christ...He lives in me!

Now watch what he said to the Colossian church:

Colossians 3:1-7

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

With all that said, look at vv3-7 of tonight's chapter in Romans

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now are we getting it?!

OK, well maybe you've heard this over and over...nothing new, right?

Guys: This explains the struggle we as believers face as we try to grow.

It is easy to forget that we are no longer obligated to the flesh.

And by the way...that counts for more than just sin. That means we are not obligated to fear...worry...anxiety...doubt...depression...

Christ is in us! And He sure doesn't struggle with these things!

Christ in us. That is what Paul is saying when he says in v4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism

To help us understand this, let's look at the definition of the word *baptize*:

To completely immerse (as in water)

In other words, completely submerged, completely immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Similar to what Paul meant in 2 Cor 5:17

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation has come: The old has gone, the new has come!

A word study will show that the words "in Christ" mean the same as "submerged or immersed in"

John the Baptist said:

Matt 3:11

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

-and-

Mark 1:8

⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Baptized...immersed in Christ...sin and death no longer have a grip on us!

And now in v8, Paul gives the silver lining:

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

To die to our old self in Christ is to really live!

⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. So there it is again...that's straight talk right there! We are no longer obligated to sin. Therefore you don't have to be a slave to it!

Do you ever feel like you are a slave to your struggle?

Now, check this out. Paul uses even straighter talk:

¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. (what are you trying to say, Paul?)

He finishes with:

¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

What does the law have to do with all this? Almost seems random.

We talked about this last week as we wrapped up Chapter 5 of Romans:

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

The law was given to us to expose our sin, so we could see our need for forgiveness.

If there were no law, there would be no sin, and thus, no need for forgiveness.

The law points us back to our moral bankruptcy and our desperate need to call out in faith!

i.e. the law condemned us!

**Sin...condemnation...sacrifice...forgiveness...sin...condemnation...
Vicious cycle!**

**But with the grace of Jesus' sacrifice, and His triumph over the grave,
we are no longer the obligation and condemnation of this vicious cycle,
because the price has been paid once and for all!**

Paul reflected this last point in what he said later to the Roman church:

Romans 8:1-2

*¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ
Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set
you free from the law of sin and death.*

Romans 5:12-21

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This section of scripture is indicative of Paul's writing style. At times, he has a point he is making, and he seemingly says it over and over in slightly different ways. But upon closer examination, you'll see much wisdom and insight.

Tonight's point: *Death through Adam compared to life through Christ.*

So with that, let's unpack it:

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

“Sin entered the world”...that means it wasn't there prior.

Can you even imagine what life would be like without sin?

What are some thoughts?

But sin entered the world through Adam (and Eve)...

And by the way...did you notice Paul only mentions Adam. Why?

Eve was deceived. Adam wasn't.

He went in with his eyes wide open.

So indeed, sin entered the world through Adam's choice.

Have you ever considered that? Choice...it's all about choice.

Sin is about choice.

And Every choice has a consequence. And we are still paying the consequence for their choice.

Let's look at that account:

Genesis 3:1-13

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”
The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Unpack – they never realized they were naked until now...

When sin entered the picture, so did shame.

Shame was given a voice in the Garden of Eden – and it has been speaking ever since.

And getting back to Romans 5, look again at what Paul said:

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

Every human after Adam and Eve was born into sin.

Romans 3:23

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And therefore: When sin entered the world, so did death.

Genesis 3:17-19

¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;

*for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”*

We can assume that *Before sin, there was no death.* Wow, what would that have been like?

God had warned Adam of this whole thing in the previous chapter;

Genesis 2:15-17

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

And of course, we know this meant a spiritual death, because when Adam and Eve sinned and were evicted from the garden, they still lived for a while. They farmed, bore children (in pain, by the way), etc...then they physically died.

But there is no evidence that there was any kind of death before sin entered the picture.

In fact, in the end times prophecy scriptures, God talks about restoring things back to where they were

Revelation 21:3-5

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

And then Paul says in v12:

*¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, **because all sinned—***

All have sinned...no one is exempt.

Again...Romans 3:23

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

An awareness of this fact helps keep us well-grounded...real.

It also keeps the majesty of the Gospel forefront in our minds, realizing what God has done to reconcile us to Himself...realizing how much He loves us!

Paul goes on in v13:

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. (they were both born of God, and sinless at birth)

Paul says *sin was in the world before the law was given*. We just unpacked the original of sin. It dates back to the garden.

Then Paul says even though the law hadn't yet been introduced until Moses, death still reigned because sin *introduced* death into the world.

But get his use of verbiage: *Death reigned. Reigned? Really?*

Well, yes. Because no one escapes the grave, short of Jesus' return. That's why Paul said of Jesus in v15:

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

I'll try my best to unpack this...basically we see two tracks here:

Adam vs Jesus. Both born of God, sinless. Yet Adam sinned...trespassed...and because of his trespass, many have died. I mean, we have a 100% mortality rate!

But Jesus' sinless life...being the spotless Lamb of God, doesn't compare to Adam's. Whereas Adam's sin brought sin and death to the human race...a natural consequence...Jesus' sacrifice makes sinful mankind holy and righteous in God's eyes...a very unnatural and amazing act of grace!

The depth of Adam's sin is no comparison to the height of Jesus' sacrifice!

And isn't that just like God...He does things and then some!

A double portion for their shame, says the Lord! More than conquerors!

Paul goes on:

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

OK, more evidence for his point.

Then he finishes with:

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

The law was given to us to expose our sin, so we could see our need for forgiveness.

If there were no law, there would be no sin, and thus, no need for forgiveness.

The law points us back to our moral bankruptcy and our desperate need to call out in faith!

And once God's law, His moral standard is used as a measuring stick against our lives, our great sin is exposed...greater than we knew...deeper than we'd admit...

Jeremiah 17:9

*⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?*

But God knows...*The One Who knows us best – loves us most!*

And His grace expands to the width and the depth and the height of our sin!

There is no limit to God's grace!

And then Paul closes with this point:

²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The old saying “Nothing is sure except death and taxes”

As sure as sin brings death, and everyone dies...no one would argue this...by the same measure that that is true...*God's grace brings us righteousness and eternal life through Jesus Christ!*

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

OK. let's unpack this...looking at v6 he makes a curious statement:

⁶ *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

That is an interesting way of putting it...at just the right time...

Did you know...*God's timing is always perfect.*

Ecclesiastes 3:11

¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

In the original language it had a slightly deeper meaning...more like: ***God has made everything appropriate and beautiful, in its right time.***

Get that...appropriate...God's ways are best. He knows exactly what is needed.

Beautiful...reflecting His character.

Question: ***Whose character do you want reflected in your life – Yours or God's?***

In the decisions you make...in the way you act and react?

And notice...when does it happen? In its right time...in God's time.

The Book of Psalms begins with:

Psalms 1:1-3

¹ *Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

² *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

And notice in the scripture from Ecclesiastes 3

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

What does that mean? And how does this tie in with what Romans 5 says?

You see, in each of us, at some level we know we are eternal beings, and that we are going to spend eternity one place or the other...so we each have an eternal perspective - in our spirit man, that is....that's just how we are wired...to get our identity from God...to get our marching orders from Him...to do as He says, to be *led* by Him, even though we don't necessarily see or understand...in fact, we *can't* see...*no one can fathom*...but we accept it by faith, we trust God, we don't lean on our own understanding...we acknowledge Him, we step out of the boat...we taste and see that He is good...we accept His manna for today, not knowing about tomorrow, just trusting Him day by day...

Guys – that is the powerless state that Paul is talking about.

Could it be that part of the “at just the right time” idea means us coming to the end of ourselves? Giving up control? Accepting our powerlessness (CR step 1)

In other words...coming out of denial.

Guys-as long as we are trying to do it ourselves...trying to figure it out ourselves...refusing to surrender...God can't do His miracle.

Yet, in our humanity, in our flesh, there is still the sinful nature that wants to figure things out on our own, that wants to try to “fathom what God has done” or what He is going to do...we try to make it palatable...something we can predict and control...we dilute God's extraordinary to make it compatible with our ordinary...we obey as we are comfortable with...we give up what we want to give up...surrender is on *our* terms...even intimacy with God is on our terms. Here's the problem with that...it won't work!

Ecclesiastes 3 says we can't fathom it...we can't fix it...control it.

God gave us the ability to say “no” to our God-given destiny.

People do it all the time. And it's a shame.

God has set eternity in our hearts....and at times there's a nagging, or a drawing in our spirits...and do I dare say - even a *haunting* as God draws us to a place of awareness...and unfortunately, many of us will spend a lifetime running from this haunting, running from God...we will run to busyness...achievement...accolades...we will run into the arms of another person...we will run to our addictions...we will run to controlling our environment....*even ministry*...anything that will provide a distraction and momentary relief from the aching we are feeling in our souls...

And all the while....we are running from God and running from our destiny.

Did you know:

We can run to God and from Him at the same time.

But oh when we stop running...when we finally surrender to our powerlessness...when we *do* let go and let God...then, low and behold, we find ourselves doing things we never thought we'd do...we find ourselves free in areas we never thought we'd be free in...we have newfound strength, we have newfound resolve...the things that used to set us back don't affect us anymore...we have a reason to get up in the morning...we have joy...we are not giving in to fear...we have purpose and meaning...our passions and talents come alive...we are walking in our destiny!! Praise God!

Christ died for the powerless!

If we had the power to get composure and be in control and stay in control...we wouldn't need Christ!

Listen...if you are in a situation that has you backed into a corner...you feel powerless...maybe even hopeless...you don't know how it can possibly be remedied...how anything good can come out of it...

I say congratulations, you are ripe for a miracle!

⁶ *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. And then Paul says something curious...* ⁷ *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.*

That word *righteous* in this context means decent, upright. And the “good person” mentioned is in reference to a worthy, unselfish and moral person of noble character.

Paul is saying in essence...it is conceivable that someone may choose to die for a decent person in certain circumstances, and even more so if that person was of noble character...soldiers give their lives for their kings, for instance.

But verse 8 says...

⁸ *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

i.e. God showed the full extent of His love but sending His Son to die, not just for those who were good and maybe more deserving of special treatment...but while we were anything but good and noble...while we in our sin...while we were deserving of death and powerless to do anything about it...instead, at just the right time...Christ took our place and died for us...He was our substitute!

God loved us at our darkest!

And Paul goes on...

⁹ *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

Justified...we have been talking about that.

Justified: Declared not guilty. (Just as if we never sinned).

It is a strong legal term. As if there were never any charges!

And it was done not only so we would be forgiven, but so we would be spared His wrath!

And Paul says “how much more”. i.e. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us when we didn’t deserve it, and He proved how much He loved us by sparing us from the wrath our sin deserves.

And then he goes on to back this up in v10:

¹⁰ For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

And now watch what he says in v11:

¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Boast! Paul used that term earlier in Chapter 5 in reference to hope:

² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God

We gain access to this amazing grace by what? Faith!

And then he says: *And we boast in the hope of the glory of God*

Boast...what does he mean? *Go around bragging?*

In v2 he is saying we *rejoice* in this hope! We talk about it, we think about it...it is in the forefront of our minds when trouble sets in...it is a desire that we cherish...and we are deeply comforted knowing this desire will be fulfilled to the glory of God! We can be assured of it! Fully persuaded!

I’m gonna see a victory! God is going to be glorified in this somehow!

And tonight in v11 he is saying we *boast* in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

We boast in our reconciliation with God.

We are at peace with God through Jesus Christ!

Hallelujah!

Question: *Do you enjoy your reconciliation with God?*

Do you talk about it, think about it...it is in the forefront of your mind when trouble sets in? Is it something you cherish?

Are you deeply comforted knowing this reconciliation has happened to the glory of God!

Are you assured that you are at peace with God? Fully persuaded?

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

It will be all we can do to unpack these 5 verses tonight.

Notice in v1 it says *since we have been justified through faith*

Justified: Declared not guilty. (Just as if we never sinned).

It is a strong legal term. As if there were never any charges!

Can you imagine being caught red-handed in a crime. I mean, it's obvious you're guilty...you have no defense...

And then you show up in court for your arraignment and find out there is no case against you. Not only have the charges been dropped, but they were never filed to begin with. In the court system, it is as if there were never any charges made! As if you never committed the crime!

Guys, that's *Justification: Being in right standing before God.*

Another way of saying it: *Being declared righteous.*

By whom? Ourselves? Yeah, right. Others? Not likely...

By God...*Being declared righteous by God!*

How can this be? We don't deserve that...That's why it's called grace!

And get this...we obtain this is by faith alone, apart from any works on our part!

Faith! Faith in what? Faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross!

When we place our faith in this, the very righteousness of God is imputed to their account.

Somebody needs to say hallelujah!

And now notice...Paul says because of that, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*

Being at peace with God...

In Job, the oldest book in the Bible:

Job 22:21

²¹ *"Submit to God and be at peace with him;
in this way prosperity will come to you.*

Have you ever experienced a bitter disagreement with someone close to you? And perhaps that disagreement developed into a fight...perhaps forming a division to the point where neither is talking to the other.

I mean, the tension is draining...choking the life out of us!

Isn't it nice when reconciliation happens and there is peace?

Well, that all pales in comparison to having distance between us and the God who gives us the very air we breathe.

You can say "*Hey, pastor...I'm not picking any fights with God.*"

Well, did you know the Bible says:

Colossians 1:21

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

And later in Romans 5 Paul says:

Romans 5:9-10

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

The words "since" in v9 and the word "if" in v10 have basically the same meaning...so v10 could say "*since*" we were God's enemies.

Being an enemy of God is not something we should take lightly.

And again, what is it that makes us His enemy?

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Interesting use of words here...wages...in other words...*the payoff of sin.*

Because of sin, God's justice says we deserve death.

Our sin made us enemies with God.

However, as we just read, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Why would God give us a gift? We deserved death. The answer is...*His love!*

For God so loved the world...

And what do we do with this gift? Try to earn it? Send it back?

Accept it by faith!

So, while my sin made me an *enemy* with God...

My faith in Jesus Christ has made me God's friend!

James 2:23

²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

We are at peace with God because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Getting back to Romans 5, Paul goes on to say:

² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God

There it is again...we gain access to this amazing grace by what? Faith!

And then he says: And we boast in the hope of the glory of God

Boast...what does he mean? *Go around bragging?*

He is saying we *rejoice* in this hope! We talk about it, we think about it...it is in the forefront of our minds when trouble sets in...it is a desire that we cherish...and we are deeply comforted knowing this desire will be fulfilled to the glory of God! We can be assured of it! Fully persuaded!

I'm gonna see a victory! God is going to be glorified in this somehow!

Now watch: Paul goes on in vv3-5

³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

OK, wait a minute. We were just talking about rejoicing in God's amazing grace, and how we gain access to this grace by faith. Now Paul seemingly takes a detour and says we rejoice in our sufferings. *Huh? Paul, are you OK? Maybe you'd better lay down...I don't think you're feeling well...*

Maybe Paul is just a little weird, and into suffering for some reason.

Well, James echoes the same sentiment:

James 1:2-4

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

³ *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

⁴ *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Here are two of the most prolific apostles of Jesus Christ, two men who filled the pages of the New Testament with practical teaching on effective Christian living...and they both say we should *rejoice...consider it pure joy...when we suffer*.

And they weren't the only ones. Peter said this:

1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ *In all this you greatly rejoice, (there's that word again) though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

What is going on here? The answer is in the text: *Suffering produces invaluable fruit in our lives.*

Perseverance...genuineness of faith...stick-to-it-iveness...strength to stand when we've done all to stand...strength to keep going...strength to keep asking God for a miracle even though we don't see it yet...perseverance that makes us mature...no longer a child in our faith, tossed to and fro by circumstances...but instead, *mature*, not lacking anything...

So we not only rejoice in what God's grace has done, and in what we have accepted by faith...but we rejoice, and consider it joy, that because of this faith...because of what God has done...*Circumstances no longer have to annihilate us!*

As we stick in there, and stand by faith, God is *thickening* our skin at the same time as He is making us *comfortable* in it. We are learning to hit a stride...be free to celebrate who we are in Christ!

“Freedom is the assurance that your needs for security, significance, love, acceptance, and worth are always met in Christ.”

Neil Anderson

And what is the goal of this perseverance? *Character...*

Expand on...(not reputation) genuineness of faith

And because of the payoff from that hard work...we experience hope!

Hope! And Paul says in Romans 5 *hope does not put us to shame...*

In other words...*You will never regret hoping in God.*

It'll never come back to bite you!

Psalm 25:1-5

¹ *In you, LORD my God,
I put my trust.*

² *I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

³ *No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.*

⁴ *Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.*

⁵ *Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.*

Nowhere here does it say God removes all our suffering and setbacks. Instead, it says when these happen, we can be assured they will not overtake us...we will not be put to shame if we hope in God. He is doing something in it!

And what is the payoff of hoping in the Lord? That it *may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Peter 4:12-13

¹² *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

So we see the pattern – suffering, hope, glory...suffering, hope, glory...

All the way til we see Him face to face!

(Phil 1:6 my life verse)

And by the way...*God promises to personally restore us after we suffer.*

1 Peter 5:10

¹⁰ *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

So indeed...rejoice!

Let me just share an observation:

I had a conversation recently....(Russell)

But see...our brokenness kicks in

We get it in our minds what a positive answer to prayer looks like

We box God in

**Anything contrary to our idea of answered prayer gets
categorized as a “no” from God, or even worse, that He
didn’t hear us**

We wrongly assume we did something wrong

We wrongly assume we missed God

We wrongly assume we must find our way back to God

We get stuck....and wrongly assume we will stay stuck

When the truth of the matter is.....God has been there the whole time...

“As soon as he hears, he will answer you”.

**God heard you and is faithfully, lovingly, answering your prayers,
working His plan,**

Sometimes, God answers prayer by refining you by His Holy Spirit fire

James 1:2-4

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

³ *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

⁴ *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Joy?! Really? Well, yes...

Also – notice it doesn't say "*consider it pure joy when God removes all your trials so you'll be happy*"

Here, James is saying this trial came to mature and complete us.

***i.e. we wouldn't be mature and complete without trials and struggle**

God knows what it will take to heal us and make us strong

Sometimes, the most loving thing God can do is reopen a wound

(and reopen, and reopen...)

But if we don't get that, we will internalize it...think something is wrong and miss what God is doing

We say "Hey God, I don't understand....I've been praying about this situation and it only seems to get worse."

-or-

"Lord, I've been praying for you to heal me in this area, and it seems like it keeps coming back up. I'm never going to get out of this rut"

And again, we assume we missed God, or that maybe He won't answer our prayer. (and of course, the devil will remind you of that)

When the truth of the matter is that God is answering your prayer!! He heard you when you prayed it.

Philippians 2:13

¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Getting back to James... If we had spent all our time being self-focused, thinking we missed God, we would missed:

(show James 1) *Perseverance, maturity, not lacking anything*
Strong, much stronger than we were before the fire
Ready for battle
Ready to do what we couldn't have done on our own
Ready to take on a God-sized destiny

Being able to say *"You know, in the past, what you just said or what just happened would've flattened me. But I know who I am now, and that doesn't phase me. God has thickened my skin"*

That is the objective God has in allowing trials to occur or wounds to be opened....to make us strong....stronger than before

Scar tissue is stronger than the original tissue

We pray for the original tissue...we pray for God to make everything alright....for Him to remove our obstacles...

But God, because He loves us so much, knows what we need even more than that. He knows what will truly bring us healing and make us stronger.

I believe there is nothing that makes God smile more than His people trusting Him, even when it hurts, submitting to the process instead of fighting it, growing strong through the process and emerging a champion

I believe He loves to see us get a little Holy Spirit swagger..

"Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee"

This dunamis power we've been discussing doesn't just come by entitlement or osmosis, by us just sitting around idle and then zap!

(This) God’s “dunamis” power often comes by fire!

Look at the harmony in the epistles:

1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Again – the trial came to refine us, to strengthen our faith

That purification doesn’t occur from happiness, it comes by fire!

Look at how Paul puts it:

Romans 5:3-5

³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Rejoice in our sufferings?!

Suffering – perseverance – character – hope **Hope!**

We would miss all that if we think we missed God.

In conclusion:

Don’t quench the fire (instead get all you can from it)

Don’t wish away the season

Life doesn’t start after this season....life is now!!!

Jesus’ example: “*Lord, please take this away.....but not my will.....*”

Likewise, we should say:

“Lord, if it be Your will, I ask that You remove this obstacle, but more than that....I don’t want to miss what You have for me! Heal me, however you see fit.” I trust You, and I know You must have a reason for this, and I don’t want to miss it!”

(We must understand that) Sometimes, the fire is a direct answer to prayer

(We must understand that) This information changes everything

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Abraham. I thought we could look a little closer at him tonight.

Taking God at His word, Abraham stepped out from all that was familiar and went forth on a journey to a destination only known by God.

At some point Abraham had to ask himself questions that we ourselves must ask when faced with challenges:

Am I going to let my past failures prevent me from taking the journey God has for me?

Am I afraid to change? What are my fears of the future?

These are good, honest questions we must ask ourselves.

We may not be facing the things Abraham faced, but we all face things that are bigger than we are.

V18 says:

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed

Against all hope, Abraham *in* hope...

What does that mean? It means *Abraham hoped when it didn't make any sense!*

What God told him to do was crazy when you look at the physical evidence.

Listen: *When God plans a miracle for us, He doesn't need to do a feasibility study first!*

Against all hope, Abraham believed...why? How?

Abraham believed God, not the evidence!

What do we know about Abraham and his character?

Abraham knew the God he was dealing with.
He had complete confidence in the One he completely trusted.

He knew God to be his great, good and faithful Friend. (Gen 15 God called Himself Abraham's shield, his very great reward)(Abraham was called a friend of God)

The secret to Abraham's success was in his friendship with God.

In Gen 17:

God makes a covenant with Abraham that he will be the father of many nations

God changes his name from Abram to Abraham (which means father of many)

And God tells him that he and Sarah will have a son named Isaac, which is fine until you consider that he was 100 years old and Sarah was 90

Abraham was faced with a crisis of truth.

A moment when he was faced with something larger than himself, something that made no sense.

He was challenged to the very core of his being.

And faced with the question of what he really believes.

We will also face these moments – when a trial brings a crisis of truth

What do I believe? I mean *really* believe?

Is God who He says he is?

Can He deliver? Will He deliver? What if He doesn't?

How do I know His promises are even for me?

This crisis of truth will expose our inner belief, and our actions (our default) is a product of that inner belief.

We will think and act in accordance with how we believe.

An evidence-centered faith focuses on the problem –

A God-centered faith focuses on the One who can solve the problem

Hebrews - let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author...

An old saying:

Regret looks back – worry looks around – faith looks up.

Let's look at a God-centered faith in light of Abraham's example:

A God-centered faith will give you power to stand against the odds.

Again, look at verse 18 *Against all hope*

It made no sense. It was crazy talk

It was counter-intuitive i.e. contrary to the evidence

But God said it, and that was good enough for Abraham

Example of Elisha and his servant

2 Kings 6:15-17

¹⁵ *When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.*

¹⁶ *"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*

¹⁷ *And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

We too will face the same – times when we feel surrounded,
overwhelmed – when there is no possible way we will make it

Abraham faced it - v 20 says

20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God

Another point: A God-centered faith enables us to face the problem.

Romans 4:19

¹⁹ *Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.*

Faith does not mean denying the problem.

And being real about the problem is not indicative of a lack of faith

Abraham “faced the fact” without weakening in his faith

Sometimes we confuse faith for a state we get in where we feel we must go around speaking just positive and prophetic words. *“Hey, it’s all good...or God is good, all the time...”*

Faith does not mean denial. In fact, I would go on to say denial is not faith-based at all. It’s just mind games!!

Denial: *refusal to admit the truth or reality of a situation*

I don’t see any denial in Abraham

Denial keeps us from facing some potentially hurtful things, so maybe we like denial because it’s comfortable

For instance:

Perhaps God is asking us to go on a pilgrimage of healing from past hurts

Living in denial protects us from that pain and we don’t want to pick up our stakes and move

Jeremiah 6:14 (TLB)

You can't heal a wound by saying it's not there.

But that's what we tend to do:

"I'm fine"

"That didn't hurt"

"I forgive them"

"I can handle this"

Instead: ***God-centered faith points us to God.***

in essence, we are saying God, *You are the only one who can change my situation. If You don't act, I'm done.*

So, with a God-centered faith we face the problem and see our utter need for God!

A further point: A God-centered faith strengthens us.

²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God

Abraham wasn't just strengthened to have faith. He was strengthened in his faith.

He wasn't just strengthened to stand. He was strengthened *in* his stand

Sometimes in a trial we wait for the strength to stand in faith.

When we aren't "feeling it" we cave in, assume we are deficient and disqualified

Instead, God asks us to stand. And when we have done everything to stand, stand. And in that stand, in that faith...we are strengthened.

Paul said regarding the thorn in his flesh:

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Last point: A God-centered faith brings blessing.

A God-centered faith gives God the opportunity to do a God-sized work!

When we focus only on the problem (obsess on what we see....the physical evidence....and many times *false* evidence) we are dwelling in the natural and limiting the supernatural.

Jesus said "*with man this is impossible, but with God...*"

Isaiah 64:4

⁴ *Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.*

God wants to do a work that is larger than we are!

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,*

**Even our imagination hasn't even scratched the surface of what God can do,
and wants to do!!**

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Let’s unpack that for a moment...

Paul is bringing Abraham into the discussion. Why? What do we know about Abraham?

He was chosen by God to be the forefather of the nation of Israel. He was given great promises by God...that he and his wife would have a son at an old age...that many nations and kings would come from his lineage...as many descendants as the stars in the sky...

But was it about the promises that Abraham received, or about what he did with them, that made him noteworthy?

Genesis 15:6

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

See...Abraham had nothing to boast about. *None of the promises God gave Abraham were attainable by himself.*

God saw to that.

Genesis 15:2

² But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And

Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

He and his wife were childless. In fact, he already a plan for his estate to be will to another man sine he had no heirs.

Genesis 17:17

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

Look at that...he even laughed. Later in the story, Sarah laughed, and then denied she laughed.

What is going on here?

God allowed the odds to be stacked against Abraham.

Why? So that *When the miracle occurred, it would be a clear move of God.*

Will he do the same thing in us? Sure.

If it is something we can attain on our own, we wouldn’t need God.

But as we are reading, Abraham had nothing to boast about.

It was only by his faith in God that Abraham saw his promise.

Paul continues the point further:

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.

That’s reasonable. If you work and earn a wage, you are entitled to that wage.

But when we have done nothing to deserve the gift that God has given us, there is not entitlement. All we can do is accept it by faith, as he says here in v5.

⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Notice nowhere in there is David saying we deserved it.

Grace has nothing to do with our deserving it.

Grace: God’s freely given, unmerited favor.

But we can also think of it this way, in the context of what Paul is discussing:

Grace is God’s acceptance of us. Faith is our acceptance of God’s acceptance.

And now, Paul brings back the idea of this grace being for everyone, Jew and Gentile.

⁹ Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

OK...a lot of circumcision talk there. What is this about?

Paul is making the very important point that God gave Abraham the promise and even entered into the covenant with him before he was circumcised.

Genesis 17:1-8

¹ *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”*

³ *Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”*

It was after this that God then commanded Abraham to have himself and all the males in his household circumcised.

The point Paul is making is: God didn’t even allow any room for Abraham to claim it was because he was circumcised and following the law that God chose him.

Simply put: *Grace is God’s decision to choose a people for Himself apart from their merit.*

Faith is our acceptance of it, and believing it.

Paul goes on:

¹³ *It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

It is not by rule-keeping that we are made righteous.

It is only by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, and His redemptive work on the cross that we are made righteous.

In fact, *When we believe, Jesus’ own righteousness is imputed on to us. Impute: (Legal term) Ascribe a characteristic to someone by virtue of a similar quality in another.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became our sin – We became His righteousness! (what a trade!)

And because of that, the sin debt is paid in full!

The sacrifice made by Jesus, who died in our place, was made to satisfy the justice of God. Christ died so we would be spared God's wrath because of our sins. He became sin for us and took the wrath that we deserved!

Propitiation: (Another legal term.) The act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone; atonement.

Jesus' sacrifice made us "at one" with God.

¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

If dependence alone on the law were enough...in other words, if God was impressed by rule-keeping alone...then there is no need for faith.

And on the flip side:

If there were no law, there would be no sin, and thus, no need for forgiveness.

But there was a need for the law:

The law was given to us to expose our sin, so we could see our need for forgiveness.

The law points us back to our moral bankruptcy and our desperate need to call out in faith!

**And that faith, my friends, is what impresses God!
That faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness and made him a friend of God.**

What makes you a friend of God, and in right-standing with Him? Your good deeds? Your hard work? Going to church?

It is by believing in Him and His promise, and by faith, receiving His Son Jesus as your Lord and Savior!

Paul said in Chapter 3:

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

And later in chapter 10: Romans 10:9

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Let's finish up tonight's study:

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

This was all done so that all people would have access to this grace, not just an elect few!

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And regarding v17

¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

At an early age I rejected myself. Ironically, most of my problems in life are because that wounded child is still calling the shots. To this day, things will happen that make it obvious to me there is still a wounded little boy in

there...making me feel like a little boy in man's clothing. God is healing that inner child so an adult can now be in charge. I am learning to let God speak to the areas of my heart where there have been deficits. I grew up feeling like a disappointment, but God is showing me that I can never disappoint Him because I can't surprise Him! He knows all about me...my past, present, and future, and loves me anyway. He is giving me the things I never received, and I am feeling less and less like that *little boy looking over his shoulder*. And more than that...I am now learning how to give myself permission to be me!

The most amazing transformation of them all is that I know God loves me. I am learning to accept that....it's empowering. And another thing....He likes me too. He made me just like I am. I wasn't meant to anyone else. And guess what....I like me. I have learned to embrace the very characteristics of myself that I used to hate. I am not my dad. I am not anyone else. I am me. And I'm OK with that.

I am discovering things about myself I never would've believed in the past. I am doing things I never thought I'd do. For years, I had no self-confidence and was quite comfortable blending into the woodwork. However, God saw something in me I didn't see. I said I was a follower – He said I was a leader. I said I didn't matter – He said he chose me before I was even conceived and had a great plan for me. In 2009 I became the president of the company where I had worked for over 20 years prior to that as an engineer. If you would've told me long ago that I'd be in business leadership I would've laughed. But Romans 4:17 says He is *the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not*. As if that weren't enough – several years ago I felt the calling to ministry. I became ordained as a licensed minister and am now the pastor of the church I grew up in, replacing my dad when he retired in 2012. A minister? Are you kidding? And even worse, a pastor! In fact, when I was a kid people told me I had a calling on my life and I would reply “*yeah, right....you've got the wrong guy!*” I am thankful that God didn't rally around my opinion of myself.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Remember, last week, we said:

The law itself can't make us righteous. It was given to us to expose our sin, so we could see our need for forgiveness.

So in other words, Paul is saying the law...the teachings of the prophets...it all pointed to this...here it is:

²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

What a counter-culture message, especially to the traditional Jews. It is not the law...it is not the adherence to the Jewish customs...it is not being born in the right family...it is not in rule-keeping...these things don't make us righteous.

The way to be declared "Not Guilty" is by faith in Jesus Christ.

That is a message of great hope...especially on the heels of all Paul had said previously in the letter.

And notice... There is no difference between Jew and Gentile

Now *this* must have been a controversial statement, especially to those who had lived their lives thinking there *was* a difference in being a Jew.

But Paul levels the playing field with his next statement...

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

What is the key word here? *All. Every one of us.*

There is no hierarchy in how the Lord sees us.

All have sinned. We are all in the same bucket. The drug addict living under the bridge...the PTA mom...the sweet old lady that plays the organ at the church...we are all sinners in need of grace.

And then notice another key word...*justified*.

Justified: Declared not guilty. (Just as if we never sinned).

It is a strong legal term. *As if there were never any charges!*

And notice another word here: *redemption*.

In a simple dictionary definition, it is *the act of saving or being saved. To regain possession of something in exchange for payment.*

But in the Biblical context, it has a much richer meaning.

In the Jewish culture, if a person was in debt and they couldn't pay, they would have to become a slave to the creditor. A family member could, in turn, purchase, or redeem, the debtor's freedom by paying the debt themselves.

And what a beautiful description of what Jesus Christ did for us!

He paid a debt that He did not owe, I owed a debt that I could not pay!

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Footnotes

a. 2 Corinthians 5:21 Or be a sin offering

Guys – there is no redemption compared to that!

Ephesians 1:4-8

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding

As you unpack this, you see great richness!

Long before God formed the earth...before He laid down the earth's foundations, He had you in mind. You were the focus of his love. Because of His love, His intent was, and still is, to make you whole. By His own volition, He adopted you into his family through His Son, Jesus Christ. And get this – He took great pleasure in doing so! He rolled up His sleeves and planned the whole thing – start to finish. His Son, Jesus, purchased all this lavishness by the sacrifice of His own blood. He did it so you would be free - declared not guilty!

Back to the text, because it gets even better...

²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

If that doesn't move you, maybe you need to check your pulse. For some reason, this has always gotten me.

***God presented Christ.* Wait, what?!**

God “presented”? God doesn't have to present anything go me (except for maybe a knuckle sandwich)

I should be presenting something to Him!

See, that's the thing...that's what the Old Covenant was all about...us presenting something to God for momentary appeasement. But it could never wash us completely clean. We had to keep presenting that sacrifice, over and over...but it all pointed to one thing...it was a foreshadow of God doing for us, once and for all, what we couldn't do for ourselves...paying the debt in full by the sacrifice of His Son.

John 1:29

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

It all pointed to Jesus! It's all about Jesus!

And notice...what did this sacrifice -this “presentation” by God – do for us?

a sacrifice of atonement

The sacrifice made by Jesus, who died in our place, was made to satisfy the justice of God. Christ died so we would be spared God’s wrath because of our sins. He became sin for us and took the wrath that we deserved!

And because of that, We can say with clarity and confidence: God is not mad at me!

Jesus’ sacrifice made us “at one” with God.

Simply put: God made us in His image. Sin tarnished that image. Jesus purchased that image back.

Now notice, Paul goes on:

He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

OK, what’s that about?

Well, first, notice he says: *He did this to demonstrate His righteousness*

What does that mean?

That means, *God’s righteousness demands punishment for sin.*

Plain and simple. He will not be mocked. The wages of sin is death. If He got soft on sin, He wouldn’t be just or righteous.

So there’s a dilemma...He’s a just and righteous God, we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and thus, we deserve death...but He is also a gracious God...slow to anger and abounding in love...He so loved the world that He didn’t want anyone to perish, but instead wanted us to have eternal life with Him...so He presented a plan that would satisfy His own demands...a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world, once and for all...His own Son!

God did this! For you – for me! Because of His amazing love!

Christ's sacrifice is God's ultimate "work-around"

And it's because of His love!

I've heard it likened to a prison warden who hates crime, and has imprisoned people for their crimes, then he sends his own son into the prison to tell them how to escape, and he even gives them the key to his own home so they will have a place to live.

Guys, that's grace! That's the Gospel message!

And then notice Paul starts talking about the sins committed before Jesus' sacrifice:

because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Without spending a lot of time – this is basically saying all the Old Covenant sacrifices were temporary coverings of the sin. These sacrifices had to be done over and over for the covering of sin...but they never paid the debt in full. It all pointed to Jesus paying the debt once and for all...now, even their centuries-old sins were not only covered, but paid for in full through Jesus Christ!

And now, with all this rich doctrine, Paul drives home the point:

And that point is: *We bring nothing to the table.*

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

There is no room for patting ourselves on the back for how well we keep the law...how much we go to church...how we watch certain evangelists

or give to their ministries...it is not by belonging to a particular political party...That is not what makes us righteous. It is our faith in Jesus Christ, and His redemption purchased by His own blood that we are saved.

That's what it's all about! *That's* keeping the main thing...

Paul echoes the point in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

And this plan is the same for all people - Gentiles, or Jews!

¹ What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ² Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

Paul is continuing in the discussion with the Jews about their heritage. In the last chapter he was telling them to not kick back and rest in their Jewish heritage and think that there is no accountability for them. They will be judged just like the Gentiles.

But now, he is basically saying, “But don’t give up your heritage just yet. Being a Jew is very important and has purpose.”

The Jews were God’s chosen people. As we said a few weeks ago:

It was God's intent that the world be evangelized through the Jewish nation. He gave His Word through them...He gave His law through them...He gave His promises through them...He sent His Son through them...

So indeed, being a Jew was still important and worthwhile. But it also came with responsibility, as we noticed.

Now notice in v3:

³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness?

Our unfaithfulness does not nullify God's faithfulness.

Aren't you glad for that?! God can take care of Himself! His holiness isn't so fragile He needs us to be the keepers of it.

Another way of saying it...

God's work will be done with or without us!

Ezekiel 36:23

²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

If we choose to be unfaithful, God will preserve His name, and move on and use someone else.

Guys, I hate to say it this way...We need to get over ourselves.

God doesn't need us, but in His grace, He wants us!

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

He loved the whole world, and didn't want anyone to perish. He wanted to use the Jews to reach the world, but they were stiff-necked and stubborn, so He brought His Gospel to the Gentiles instead.

John 1:10-13

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

So God does indeed carry out His will...with us or without us...He is true and unchanging.

And then Paul drives home the point by saying in v4:

³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴ Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar.

This is a strong statement! God never lies!

Numbers 23:19

*¹⁹ God is not human, that he should lie,
not a human being, that he should change his mind.
Does he speak and then not act?
Does he promise and not fulfill?*

Charles Spurgeon said:

“It is a strange, strong expression; but it is none too strong. If God says one thing, and every man in the world says another, God is true, and all men are false. God speaks the truth, and cannot lie. God cannot change; his word, like himself, is immutable. We are to believe God's truth if nobody else believes it. The general consensus of opinion is nothing to a Christian. He believes God's word, and he thinks more of that than of the universal opinion of men.”

Guys - If God fails to move in our situation, or if it goes against what we thought or wanted...if there is ever a disconnect between us and God...we can be assured it wasn't on God's end...it is always on our end!

I see this often with people who are supposedly praying about their situation, but will not wait on the Lord, and instead, they take matters into their own hands.

Don't blame God if your lack of trust brings negative consequences.

I've said it before:

We lie to God in prayer if we don't rely on Him after prayer.

We talked about this Sunday. Look how David ends his famous Psalm 27:

Psalm 27:13-14

¹³ *I remain confident of this:*

*I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.*

¹⁴ *Wait for the LORD;*

*be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.*

Back to tonight's text, Paul goes on:

As it is written:

*"So that you may be proved right when you speak
and prevail when you judge."*

This is a quote from Psalm 51:4, David's famous penitential Psalm. He is in essence saying:

***God, I've broken fellowship with You with my sin. You see all I have done,
You know everything. Whatever you decide about me is fair.***

Paul goes on in v5:

⁵ *But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)* ⁶ *Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?* ⁷ *Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"* ⁸ *Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!*

Apparently, some were claiming Paul was preaching greasy grace. A message that says: “*Hey, it doesn’t matter what I do...in fact, the worse I do the more God seems to be glorified through it.*”

We need to get this straight in our minds.

God is full of grace, but He is also just.

We addressed this a few weeks ago:

God doesn’t overlook sin. (Actually, He can’t...because He is righteous and just)

Galatians 6:7

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Even though there is grace, there are natural consequences with sin.

That’s why God hates sin so much...He knows what it does to us.

But thank God for His grace, amen?! Because without it, our sinful nature would indeed be deserving of God’s wrath.

Back to the text. Paul goes on:

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;

there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away,

they have together become worthless;

there is no one who does good,

not even one.”

This is a reference to Psalm 14, where David is lamenting the depraved and corrupt condition of the culture surrounding him. He starts this particular Psalm with:

Psalm 14:1

¹ *The fool says in his heart,*

“There is no God.”

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;

there is no one who does good.

Paul goes on in Romans 3:

¹³ *“Their throats are open graves;*

their tongues practice deceit.”

This is reference to Psalm 5:9, where again, David is talking about his corrupt enemies.

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

Psalm 140:3 David talking about evildoers

¹⁴ *“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”*

Psalm 10 talking about wicked and arrogant men

¹⁵ *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

¹⁶ *ruin and misery mark their ways,*

¹⁷ *and the way of peace they do not know.”*

Isaiah describing the sinful state of the people

¹⁸ *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

David describing the sinfulness of the wicked

So what is the point Paul is making in all this?

We don't it within ourselves to save ourselves!

We can't fix ourselves, we can't direct ourselves, we can't heal ourselves...we don't even know ourselves. We are so deceived, we don't even know we're deceived.

That is, of course, mankind, in and of ourselves!

We bring nothing to the table! We are lost without God! From start to finish! From the best in us to the worst in us.

It is the same lament Paul had later about himself in his letter to the Roman church:

Romans 7:18-19

¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Then Paul finishes the section with:

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

What is all this saying?

The law itself can't make us righteous. It was given to us to expose our sin, so we could see our need for forgiveness.

That is a newsflash for us today, but it was especially a newsflash for the Jews who were riding on the coattails of their Jewish traditions, including the law given to Moses. They thought just because they were Jews, and had the law...maybe even memorized the law...that this alone made them righteous. They likely thought all the references to sinful man in the Old Testament were in reference to the Gentiles.

Paul was careful to consistently challenge this kind of thinking. In fact, it is the basic premise of the book of Galatians.

Galatians 2:21

²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

And then, as we will see next time, later in Romans 3 he says:

Romans 3:22

²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile

Paul points out that this horrific description of man's utter sinfulness come to us **in the law**; and it is intended for **those under the law**, to silence every critic and to demonstrate the universal guilt of mankind – that **all the world may become guilty before God**.

i. "We may add, that though all the vices here enumerated are not found conspicuously in every individual, yet they may be justly and truly ascribed to human nature, as we have already observed." (Calvin)

b. **It says to those who are under the law**: If God speaks this way to those who had the law, and attempted to *do* the law, it is evident that **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight**.

i. Remember that many Jewish people of Paul's day took every passage of the Old Testament describing evil and applied it only to the Gentiles – not to themselves. Paul makes it clear that God speaks **to those who are under the law**.

c. **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight**: The law cannot save us. The law can't justify anyone. It is useful in giving us **the knowledge of sin**, but it cannot save us.

i. Since the time of Adam and Eve, people have tried to justify themselves **by the deeds of the law**. In the Garden of Eden Adam tried to make himself presentable to God by making coverings out of fig leaves – and he failed. In Job, the oldest book of the Bible, the problem is presented clearly: *how can a man be righteous before God?* (Job 9:2). God makes part of the answer clear here through Paul – the answer is *not* in the performance of good works, in **the deeds of the law**.

ii. How we need to deeply understand this – that **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified!**

- This means that the law, having been broken, now can only condemn us – it can never save us.

- This means that even if we could now begin to perfectly keep the law of God it could not make up for past disobedience, or remove present guilt.

- This means that keeping the law is NOT God's way of salvation or of blessing under the New Covenant.

d. **For by the law is the knowledge of sin**: J.B. Phillip's paraphrase of this phrase is striking. He writes, "*it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.*"

i. "Lest any should think that the law hereupon is useless, he goes on to show its use, but a quite contrary one to what they intended." (Poole)

**This chapter is clearly addressing hypocrisy and inconsistency in the church.
The attitude that says “do as I say, not as I do.”**

A theme to this section might be: *Religion Can’t Save You.*

Is that still true today?

I believe: *One of the greatest lies Satan tells us is that religion alone can save us.*

**Just go to church now and then...maybe be a part of food
ministry...keep a few rules...go to confession now and then...**

Did you know that as of last year, there were over 4,000 known religions in the world?

Hinduism, Muslim, Buddhism, even Christianity...it is easy to think that adherence to the practices of a religion will gain us right standing with God and even give us eternal life.

My dad used to say *religion will send more people to hell than anything else.*

What does that mean to you?

What is the danger in thinking religion alone can save you?

When we rely on religion, we become blind to our sin.

It becomes about works...what we do or don’t do...we can become prideful and even self-righteous.

That’s exactly what the Pharisees were like. On one occasion, Jesus confronted them by saying:

Mark 7:6-8

⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

**“‘These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.**

⁷ *They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.'*

⁸ *You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."*

Remember, it was these "religious" ones that had Jesus crucified.

Religion is about outward works, whereas God is interested in our hearts.

Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* ¹³ *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Here's the bottom line:

No amount of rule-keeping or careful adherence to religious practices can reconcile a sinner to the holy God.

What's the answer?

It's not about religion – it's about relationship.

In John 3, Jesus has a confrontation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling party of the temple. In John 3:3 Jesus said the famous words:

³ *Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."*

Question: Do you think attending church now and then will get you to heaven? Is church just a bullet point on your to-do list?

Or – are you born again? Is Jesus your Savior and Lord?

It's not about religion – it's about relationship.

Then, in v24 Paul makes a strong statement:

²⁴ *As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*

Wow! Did you know *One of the most effective ways to dishonor the Lord and His name is with our hypocrisy.*

Saying one thing and doing another?

And even worst – doing the opposite!

Portraying that we are Christians and yet living and acting just like the world.

Why do you think the culture loves it so much when a prominent Christian leader falls? They have a field day with it.

(Dad’s house, patio sliding glass door.)

Guys: *Our top desire should be to bring honor to the Lord and His name.*

Why does it matter? Our kids are watching, our neighbors...our co-workers

In the remaining section of tonight’s text Paul addresses the Jews and one of their oldest traditions: *Circumcision.*

²⁵ *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.* ²⁶ *So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?* ²⁷ *The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.*

²⁸ *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.* ²⁹ *No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.*

So what is this all about? Why was circumcision so important? It was one of the requirements the Lord gave Abram back in Genesis 17 before He changed his name to Abraham:

Genesis 17:10-14

¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Circumcision: *Cutting away of the flesh.*

The act of physical circumcision was a symbol of cutting off the old life (the flesh) and entering into a new one with God as center.

The idea was that they would bear the physical mark of covenant relationship with God, they were also under obligation to manifest specific spiritual qualities of commitment and obedience to the Lord's will.

But the physical circumcision was never meant to substitute for the spiritual condition of the heart. Both were necessary.

Jeremiah 4:4

*⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
circumcise your hearts,
you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire
because of the evil you have done—
burn with no one to quench it.*

Deuteronomy 10:16

¹⁶ Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Apparently, this was still the condition of the Roman church...Jews resting on their heritage...resting on their traditions, yet without a circumcised heart. Look at what he said in v29:

Romans 2:29

²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.

What is he saying?

We, in the new covenant, experience a spiritual circumcision.

And it is just as necessary as the circumcision of the old covenant.

Colossians 2:9-13

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

Now we see the bigger picture...this was a heart condition thing! It always was. But the Jews found it easy to rest on the physical part of the circumcision and assume that it was good enough.

What are some ways we might still do that today?

And remember, everything in the Bible is intentional. In Josh 5, they had just crossed the Jordan, erected a rock monument to remember God's faithfulness, and then God commands circumcision.

Joshua 5:2

² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again." ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

Why? Most of the circumcised men died in the dessert because of their disobedience. This was a whole new group of Israelites who had never been circumcised. Yet, they were about to embark on the victorious conquest of the Promised Land.

Guys, this is a kingdom principle:

We will not be able to effectively fight for the new while holding on to the old!
(It's got to go! Our old self ruled by the flesh – it must be put off!)

God had taken them out of Egypt – now He wanted to take Egypt out of them

I'll tell you...we are the same. God takes us out of our pasts, but sometimes, the past still has its grip on us. So God must take the past out of us.

We must come out of denial and face our own brokenness and sin. Each of us has it...no one is above it...we must experience the severing of these things if we are going to be in position for our breakthrough!

And that's why "change" is so necessary. The pruning and the cutting away of the worldly attachments that are not meant for the journey. They hold us back.

In Chapter 3, Paul turns a corner and begins to discuss the important doctrine of righteousness by faith.

God's Righteous Judgment

¹ You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

So, let's begin to unpack this:

Notice in v1...*You, therefore, have no excuse...*

Whenever we see "therefore"...

Chapter 1 discussed those in the world, who knew there was a God, but stubbornly refused to acknowledge Him. God gave them over to their sinful desires to do what their flesh desired. Paul ended the chapter by saying:

³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

OK, so that is what “those people” do...those that don't acknowledge God.

But then Paul goes on to include those who *do* acknowledge God, by saying...

¹ You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

In other words...*The fact that we acknowledge God does not mean we are free to point fingers.*

In fact, there is even more scrutiny...

Look at how the message version puts it:

But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done.

Yikes! Unpack a little.

One thing I've noticed...*We often consciously criticize others for things we subconsciously dislike about ourselves.*

It's just human nature. But God sees through it!

Paul goes on...

² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

In other words...*God is just. His truth is consistent and absolute.*

It is just as true for us and it is for an unbeliever.

Why would we think it would be different for us?

Now notice...

³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Apparently, this must've been going on in the Roman church. Passing judgment on the culture, yet doing the same things themselves.

Then He makes a point that should grip our hearts as believers...

⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

In other words...

When God shows us kindness, tolerance, and patience, it is not because we are special – it is to bring us to repentance!

Get that – God's kindness should bring us to repentance. Not His heavy hand.

His kindness should break our hearts and make us want to give Him everything!

God's grace and kindness is not a license to do what we want!

Jude 4

⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about^[a] long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Titus 2:11-12

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age

So important that we understand this. And again...Paul was explaining this to the Roman church, apparently for a reason.

In v5, Paul goes on...

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

Apparently, there were those who came to church and did the Christian thing on the outside, but stubbornly refused to see themselves as a sinner in need of grace just like the culture. Paul was careful to point out that they would not avoid God’s wrath just because they went to church.

Let’s look at what the Bible says about that.

Psalm 62:11-12

*¹¹ One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
“Power belongs to you, God,
¹² and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”;
and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”*

Proverbs 24:12

*¹² If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,”
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?
Does not he who guards your life know it?
Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?*

Again, guys, this should grip our hearts!

He goes on...

⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Are we driven to do good and bring God glory and honor with our lives?

Or do we seek only what is good for ourselves?

Look at the payoff...eternal life!

Reminds me of what Jesus said:

Matthew 10:39

³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Message version:

If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

Now look at the contrast:

⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

We talked about this a couple weeks ago.

God doesn't overlook sin.

They're not getting away with it!

We also discussed that "first for the Jew..."

Now let's finish this section:

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by

nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

OK, there is some deep stuff here...

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

It helps to remember that Paul is now addressing the Jews. He is saying that God takes into account that some people sin not knowing the law they just broke...they don't know the law. They are still judged and responsible for their sin, but they are judged differently.

But for those who do have the law, and then sin against that law...they will be judged more severely by the law itself.

James 4:17

¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

Paul goes further in v13:

¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Hearing alone doesn't cut it. It is by obeying that we are declared righteous.

James also said:

James 1:22

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Paul finishes by saying:

¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their

consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ *This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

This goes back to what Paul said in Romans 1:

God made us with an inner conscience that knows there is a God simply by looking at His creation. (He made us that way...all of us! Even the atheist!)

God made His creation to reflect His invisible qualities and divine nature. Is it coincidence that people go to the beach for a spiritual renewal? Or to the mountains? They may not acknowledge God in it, but they do it instinctually.

So when unbelievers basically follow the law instinctively, they are proving the truth of God's Word. They show this idea of God's moral law is not some quacky man-made idea...but it is woven into our very DNA!

And then he says in v16 this will all be on public display on the Day of Judgment. Sinner -Saint, we will all face Him on that day to give an account.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ When outsiders who have never heard of God's law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. They show that God's law is not something alien, imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong. Their response to God's yes and no will become public knowledge on the day God makes his final decision about every man and woman. The Message from God that I proclaim through Jesus Christ takes into account all these differences.

Some ancient rabbis taught that God showed partiality towards the Jews. They said: "God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another."

b. For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified: God's righteous judgment is not withheld because someone has *heard* the law; it is only held back if someone actually *does* the law.

i. The Jewish person – or the religious person – may think that he is saved because he has the law; but has he kept it? The Gentile may think that he is saved because he does not have the law, but has he kept the dictates of his own conscience?

ii. “People will be condemned, not because they have the law or do not have the law, but because they have sinned.” (Morris)

c. **As many as have sinned without law will also perish without law:** Judgment for sin can come with or without the law.

2. (14-16) Possession of the law is no advantage to the Jewish man in the Day of Judgment.

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

a. **Although not having the law, are a law to themselves:** Paul explains why the Gentile can be condemned without the law. Their **conscience** (which is **the work of the law written in their hearts**) is enough to condemn them – or, theoretically this law on the heart is enough to justify them.

i. **Written in their hearts:** Many pagan authors of Paul’s day referred to the “unwritten law” within man. They thought of it as something that pointed man to the right way. Though it is not embodied in written laws, it is in some ways more important than the written law.

ii. **A law to themselves** does *not* mean that these “obedient Gentiles” made up their own law (as we use the expression “a law unto himself”), but that they were obedient to **conscience**, the work of the law residing in themselves.

iii. “He indeed shows that ignorance is in vain pretended as an excuse by the Gentiles, since they prove by their own deeds that they have some rule of righteousness.” (Calvin)

b. **Their thoughts accusing or else excusing them:** In theory, a man might be justified (“excused”) by obeying his conscience. Unfortunately, every man has violated his conscience (God’s internal revelation to man), just as every man has violated God’s written revelation.

i. While Paul says in **Romans 2:14** that a Gentile, may **by nature do the things contained in the law** he is careful to not say that a Gentile could *fulfill the requirements* of the law by nature.

ii. Though God has His *work* within every man (resulting in conscience), man can corrupt that work, so that conscience varies from person to person. We also know that our conscience can become damaged through sin and rebellion, but then can be restored in Jesus.

iii. If our conscience is condemning us wrongly, we can take comfort in the idea that *God is greater than our heart* (1 John 3:20).

c. **Their conscience also bearing witness:** People who have never heard God’s word directly still have a moral compass they are accountable to – the **conscience**.

- i. “God is describing how He has constituted all men: there is a ‘work’ within them, making them morally conscious.” (Newell)
- ii. “He is not saying that the law is written on their hearts, as people often say, but that the *work of the law*, what the law requires of people, is written there.” (Morris)
- d. **The day when God will judge**: On this day no man will escape God’s judgment by claiming ignorance of His written revelation. Violating God’s internal revelation is enough to condemn us all.
- i. “God therefore will judge all nations according to the use and abuse they have made of this word, whether it was written in the *heart*, or written on tables of *stone*.” (Clarke)
- e. **According to my gospel**: Notice that the **day** of judgment was a part of Paul’s **gospel**. He did not shrink from declaring man’s absolute accountability to God.
- i. “‘My gospel.’ Does not this show his courage? As much as to say, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God onto salvation to every one that believeth.’ He says, ‘my gospel,’ as a soldier speaks of ‘my colors,’ or of ‘my king.’ He resolves to bear this banner to victory, and to serve this royal truth even to the death.” (Spurgeon)
- f. **God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ**: This concept is distinctively Christian. The Jews taught that God the Father alone would judge the world, committing judgment to no one – not even the Messiah.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Wow, OK...take a breath. There's a lot there. Let's unpack this, starting with:

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over...

Paul had a habit of starting sentences with “therefore”. When we see that word, we automatically want to go back and see what the “therefore” is there for.

Romans 1:18-23

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore...with this in mind...because of this...God gave them over...

Let's talk about that for a moment. To me, some of the scariest words for a believer should be “God gave them over”.

In essence, He is saying “If you want it so bad, here you go...have at it...and all it entails” No longer the conviction of right or wrong...

When we have a “besetting sin”, a constant struggle...something we keep going back to...our prayer should be “God please don't give me over to this”!

“Don't let go of me, Lord!”

In other words...It should bother us when we sin.

We should pray that it continues to bother us...that our conscience does not become seared.

Because when it no longer bothers you...when you insist that you need God and this...when you suppress the truth with wickedness...when you

exchange the immortal God for His creation...He might just give you over to it! Yikes!

OK, so what did God give them over to?

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Wait a minute...we were just talking about suppressing the truth...exchanging the Creator for the created...refusing to glorify God...now we're talking about sexual immorality!

What does sex have to do with it?

Historically, the first mark of the corruption and decline of a society is sexual immorality. What began with a defiance of God and His glory, turns quickly into physical and sensual indulgence. Look them up...Rome...Babylon...their downfall began with sexual immorality that made the dishonoring and degrading of the body common and accepted...even celebrated!

So, what are we saying...are we just wild animals with urges that can't be controlled, or is there something else going on here?

I propose to you that: *Sexual immorality is a spiritual matter, as well as physical.*

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Wow! So much here!

First of all, notice *Our bodies are members of Christ Himself!*

Wow!!

And then he goes on in vv19-20 to say:

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Our bodies are members of Christ Himself...temples of the Holy Spirit!

So, sure...they are our bodies...they are physical...but notice, it is also spiritual. The temples of the Holy Spirit!

And now notice, Paul uses the analogy of joining ourselves with a prostitute. We become one with the person we are with. Then he refers back to Genesis 2...the two will become one flesh.

It is a spiritual union as well as physical!

That's why it says "The two shall become one flesh." There is a joining...a union...Jesus referred to this:

Mark 10:7-8

⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

It was God's design for a man and wife to be joined in one flesh. Their intimacy is physical, but also spiritual.

It is God's design. That's the way it is *supposed* to be. In each of us there is a natural and even subconscious desire for intimacy. Intimacy with God first...*True intimacy...to know and be known.*

And then He gave us...mankind...the only part of His creation made in His own image...the ability, and I might go so far as to say, the responsibility, to experience physical intimacy with our spouse on a level that none of the rest of creation experiences. To know someone and be known by that someone...

So what are you saying, Pastor, that physical intimacy between spouses can be an act of worship? Yes, I am!

It is physical, of course, but also spiritual!

Now, with all that being said, can you see now why the enemy wants to pervert that? And why sexual immorality accompanies the downfall of mankind?

And why sexual immorality is mentioned so often in the Bible? More than any other sinful condition of mankind!

Now, in v26, Paul goes on to discuss the further decline of this immorality:

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Today, this is labeled hate speech. I'm just telling you what the Bible says!

Unnatural! Shameful acts! That's what this passage says.

The first step Paul described was the degrading of their bodies...sexual morality. Now, he is describing a state of moral, psychological, and even physiological confusion.

Women exchanging natural sexual relations with men for unnatural ones with women...and men doing the same with men.

But notice Paul started with "Because of this, God gave them over..."

In other words, He removed the restraints...if you're going to be this way in your mind, you might as well let the world know who you are. And so it becomes public. A depraved society accepts it...and even celebrates it!

And remember who Paul's audience is...the Roman church. Rome, the capital of debauchery in the know world at that time. Paul was speaking important Biblical truth to this new church...truth that was counter-culture, to say the least.

One author put it this way:

"All the great philosophers extolled it and practiced it, for the most part. Men like Socrates, and other great names of Greece, were homosexuals. Out of the first fifteen Roman emperors, fourteen of them were

homosexuals, and some gave themselves blatantly and openly to this vice. This was common in the Roman world, as it is becoming common in our own day. Once again, the restraints are being removed, and these things are thrusting themselves into public view.”

Ray Stedman

OK, that was Rome...but did you know that in our society...

Prior to 1973, secular psychiatry considered homosexuality a mental illness.

In 1965, Time magazine ran an article titled, “Homosexuals Can Be Cured.” The article reported that male homosexuals responded well to group psychotherapy. Over the course of several years, patients explored their struggles, cast aside their “flamboyant clothes and manners”, and worked through their hostilities and neuroses, and even began dating the opposite sex.

How far we’ve come!

Now remember the heading before v18 in this section of Romans 1:

God’s Wrath Against Sinful Humanity

What does the Bible say about homosexuality? One reference is found earlier in

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. ¹¹ Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

I don’t know how you get around that! But we live in a society that tries, don’t we?

Let’s finish this chapter:

*²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice (**bad intentions to do evil**). They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, (**rude, lack of respect**), arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

Unpack

Guys, Paul is speaking to 1st century Rome, and he is speaking to us today.

And what was he saying to them and to us?

Be different than the culture!

He says in this chapter there are two revelations being presented. We choose which one we will be part of.

Look at the two things revealed:

¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

So right out of the chute, Paul brings some more bedrock Christian doctrine... The contrast of sinful man and the holy God. Simply put:

God is holy.

God said to Moses:

Leviticus 11:45

⁴⁵ I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

And being holy means He can't associate with sin, but at the same time, it does not mean He doesn't see it. *He sees everything!*

God doesn't overlook sin. (Actually, He can't...because He is righteous and just)

Galatians 6:7

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Even though there is grace, there are natural consequences with sin.

That's why God hates sin so much...He knows what it does to us.

But thank God for His grace, amen?! Because without it, our sinful nature would indeed be deserving of God's wrath.

So what we see here is that Paul opened up the Book of Romans with solid doctrine about the Gospel. Now, he is showing the Roman church their *desperate need* for the Gospel. In order to avoid God's wrath.

And by telling them of this desperate need, he is *telling* the Gospel message.

We don't fully understand the power of the Gospel until we realize our desperate need of the Gospel!

I've heard it likened to a prison warden who hates crime, and has imprisoned people for their crimes, then he sends his own son into the prison to tell them

how to escape, and he even gives them the key to his own home so they will have a place to live.

Guys, that's grace! That's the Gospel message!

The gospel reveals how Christ turned things around.

So what we see here is a shot of the whole picture: *We established God is holy.*

God is repulsed by sin. (an attribute of His holiness)

Sin separates us from God and leads to death.

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

OK, well that's the sin component...surely God is repulsed by us like He is repulsed by our sin, right? Check this out...

God loved us while we were sinners.

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The gospel reveals a God who loves people even when they are his enemies.

Romans 5:9-11

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In the Gospel we see a holy God who can't associate with sin, and has His wrath set aside for those who suppress the truth. Yet, because of His love, He makes a way to set the ungodly right...He rescues us from our sin...He frees us from our past...He frees us from our addictions.

God wants us to escape the punishment!

And it helps to remember the setting of the Book of Romans. This was a church that existed right in the middle of a culture where not only was wrong allowed...but it was celebrated. Wrong becoming right...right becoming wrong. Suppressing the truth...making the truth look backward...

Isaiah 5:20

*²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter.*

2 Timothy 4:3

³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

That was a picture of the Roman culture. Just like our culture today.

Now, more than ever. This resembles the time we live in.

Guys, we need to understand, God is a loving and gracious God, but He is also a just God.

God's wrath is coming on a culture that shakes its fist at Him.

So what do we do with that? Relish in it? Or grieve it?

We should have the mind of Christ and grieve for the lost culture we live in.

Our unsaved loved ones, our neighbors, our coworkers...they will be the ones pounding on the side of the ark when the flood waters come.

God hasn't given us the ministry of "I told you so."

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We need to understand that now more than ever. We should not look at our culture with disdain, we should look at it with compassion.

These are real people who are on a collision course with God's wrath!

So back to this Roman church. They were right in the middle of the Roman culture with all its debauchery. The church needed to hear of the holiness of God. They needed to be reminded to be different than the culture! (just like us)

Getting back to the text, starting at v18 again to get a running start:

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

OK, let's look at this:

It says in v19 *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.*

What does that mean? *What may be known about God is plain to them.*

And then it says *God has made it plain to them.*

God made us with an inner conscience that knows there is a God simply by looking at His creation. (He made us that way...all of us! Even the atheist!)

Paul goes on:

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

God made His creation to reflect His invisible qualities and divine nature. Is it coincidence that people go to the beach for a spiritual renewal? Or to the mountains? They may not acknowledge God in it, but they do it instinctually.

So if that's the case, then why doesn't everyone acknowledge God?

Sin and rebellion. Plain and simple.

If there is a God, then there is accountability.

And rules of living, and consequences for choices.

Psalm 14:1

*¹ The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."*

*They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.*

To say "there is no God" forces someone to stifle the inner consciousness in them that knows there is.

That takes work...that takes stubbornness...it takes the corruption of darkness...and it takes an intentional choice.

It takes more faith to say there is no God than to say there is.

Because then it's all left to chance...no absolutes...it's all up for grabs if we are just random carbon substrate that emerged from the premortal ooze.

Let's go back to the creation for a moment:

Genesis 1:1 (Amplified Bible)

¹ In the beginning God (Elohim) created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth.

Only God can create something out of nothing.

There are a lot of creative people in the world...artists...writers...celebrities...but let's see them try to create something out of nothing!

(tell joke about scientists)

Large Hadron Collider (show pic)

It is located near Geneva, Switzerland. It is in a tunnel 575 feet below ground level.

It is the world's largest and strongest particle accelerator. It is basically a circular tube with a circumference of 16.6 miles. It is the largest machine in the world.

It has been dubbed the "*Particle Hunter*"

In this tube, atomic particles are accelerated around this loop and then smashed together to create subatomic particles. They are trying to recreate the conditions that existed just after the Big Bang.

But the problem is that they are basing all the research on the premise that matter has already been created (that's what they say happened in year 0 the Big Bang. From year 0, they say the universe expanded and cooled. The sun, the moon, the stars and planets; the trees and animals and people...were all part of that great expansion.)

This multi-billion dollar project that involves cooperation from many nations – it is basically a time machine to enable these scientists to go back and see the conditions after the creation of particles. They do this in order to better understand the universe.

However, they still cannot answer the basic question:

How were the original particles created? Where did they come from?

And more importantly:

Where did the energy come from?

The laws of physics say energy cannot be created. At least not by natural means. So we have a dilemma.

One scientist put it this way:

“Contrary to the belief of some cosmologists, something cannot come out of nothing. It’s hard to believe that at the time of the Big Bang, an explosion of unimaginable enormity occurred that created the Boson, the elementary particle of matter that scientists have been trying to chase in the Large Hadron Collider. Explosions don’t just pop out of nowhere.”

I agree. There has to be a higher being. An outside force. And His name is ***Elohim: the all-powerful God who created all things out of nothing!***

Big Bang Theory: God spoke, and “bang” it happened!

All of secular science can be summed up as man’s attempt to prove there is no God and therefore no accountability.

Look how Paul goes on:

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Now enter...idolatry. We’ll stop there tonight. Because next week it will be all we do to discuss how God gave them over to their evil desires...yikes!

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Amp Version

¹⁸ For [God does not overlook sin and] the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who in their wickedness suppress *and* stifle the truth, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them [in their inner consciousness], for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For ever since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through His workmanship [all His creation, the wonderful things that He has made], so that they [who fail to believe and trust in Him] are without excuse *and* without defense. ²¹ For even though ¹⁸they knew God [as the Creator], they

did not ^ahonor Him as God or give thanks [for His wondrous creation]. On the contrary, they became worthless in their thinking [godless, with pointless reasonings, and silly speculations], and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory *and* majesty *and* excellence of the immortal God for ^ban image [worthless idols] in the shape of mortal man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their own hearts to [sexual] impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them [abandoning them to the degrading power of sin], ²⁵ because [by choice] they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to degrading *and* vile passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural [a function contrary to nature], ²⁷ and in the same way also the men turned away from the natural function of the woman and were consumed with their desire toward one another, men with men committing shameful acts and in return receiving in their own bodies the inevitable *and* appropriate penalty for their wrongdoing.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God *or* consider Him worth knowing [as their Creator], God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do things which are improper *and* repulsive, ²⁹ until they were filled (permeated, saturated) with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice *and* mean-spiritedness. They are gossips [spreading rumors], ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors [of new forms] of evil, disobedient *and* disrespectful to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful [without pity]. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree *and* His judgment, that those who do such things deserve death, yet they not only do them, but they even [enthusiastically] approve *and* tolerate others who practice them.

Footnotes

- a. Romans 1:1 i.e. a person in bondage. One who belongs to another.
- b. Romans 1:1 In ancient Greece the word translated as "good news" or "gospel" was used to denote, among other things, success in a battle.
- c. Romans 1:13 Lit *brethren*, includes all born-again believers: men, women, and children.
- d. Romans 1:21 Anyone who attributes the existence of the world to chance or to a different creator is already guilty of deliberately rejecting God, because to deny the true God one must set aside common sense.

- e. Romans 1:21 Lit *glorify*.
- f. Romans 1:23 Paul's indictment of idolatry (images) is logical and devastating. He emphasizes that idols are essentially copies of living creatures, whether in human form (as, for example, in ancient Greek myth) or otherwise (as in Egyptian idolatry and metaphysics). These lifeless images are clearly powerless, and even the living creatures which they supposedly represent are either nonexistent hybrids and monsters, or else ordinary creatures on earth who could hardly create so much as a grain of sand.

A fool says in his heart...

Message Version:

¹⁸⁻²³ But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

²⁴⁻²⁵ So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses *us*. Oh, yes!

²⁶⁻²⁷ Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.

²⁸⁻³² Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!

As we continue to read the Book of Romans, we see a richness of Christian doctrine. We want to look for takeaways...ask questions:

Do we believe God gave his Son? Do we believe the gospel message in its entirety? Do we really believe God will work all things for our good? *All things!*

Can we really trust Him in our trials? Is He really using our trials to produce something good in our lives? Will we really see victory in our lives?

Let's pick it up tonight in v8

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Let’s stop here and unpack that before we go further.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Notice...he has never met them, yet he is thanking God for them. Did you know that is a good way to pray for someone?

When praying for someone, it is always good to give thanks for them.

You say you don’t know how to pray for someone? Start with giving thanks for them. *Thank You, Lord, that you put so-and-so in my life. Thank you for their friendship...thank you for their faith in You.*

And now, notice what he says:

because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Why was it reported all over the world? I mean all faith is important, and we rejoice when we hear about the Spirit moving in a particular area. But what makes this special?

I believe two things. First, we said last week:

This church in Rome had no formal training. No denominational affiliation. No special funding by a mega church sponsoring them. They were simply Roman believers who were there at Pentecost caught the fire and took it back to Rome with them. They started a church, and apparently, were flourishing.

This shows the dynamic nature of the Gospel. It can’t be stopped!

Secondly: We need to remember the setting here. This is Rome. The capital of the Roman Empire. It was a pagan stronghold! Can you imagine the culture around them?

Yet, in the middle of it, the church was flourishing! *The early Roman church flourished right in the middle of the most depraved society in existence at the time.*

I can think of several biblical concepts this demonstrates...

Greater is He...

In the world but not of it...

Though we live in the world we do not wage war...

Divine weapons to tear down strongholds

Where sins abound, grace...

I mean, they were right in the middle of it. And the persecution they faced was far greater than mask mandates and COVID shutdowns!

In fact, one historian said the early Christians were considered by the Roman government as “enemies of the human race”. It was this kind of sentiment that led to many of them being martyred by Nero. But again, we must remember...it was the very persecution served up by the enemy that caused the church to explode!

Guys: We must remember...*God always wins!*

We're on the winning team!

Let's pick it up in v9

⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Again, stating that he hadn't been there yet, but was looking forward to being there with them. And now notice:

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

His desire was to strengthen them. Is that your desire?

Do you strive to strengthen others...to build them up?

We should always strive to build others up, not tear them down.

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And then notice he says that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Did you know that when you build someone up, it builds you up at the same time?

(testimony...overcome by the Blood of the Lamb and the word...)

Next, in v13 it says:

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

We went over this in our Book of Acts study: Did God really prevent him from going places in his ministry? I thought the whole world needed the Gospel?

You bet. One example:

Acts 16:6

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

In this case, it was God's will for him to go to Macedonia first.

(Lydia, Paul & Silas in prison praising at midnight...)

It is always important to submit our will to God's.

James 4:13-15

¹³ Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

God always has reasons for what He does...we often don’t know what those are until later. But we always see His hand in it.

Isaiah 55:8-9

⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.

⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Now, in v14 he goes on:

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

There’s a lot here. Let’s start with v14:

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

Paul was ready to preach the Gospel to anyone who would listen. It didn’t matter...Greek, non-Greek, Jew...Gentile...the Roman church was mostly Gentiles, but it didn’t matter to Paul, who was a Jew, because his obligation was to the Gospel. It reminds me of what he said later:

Romans 8:11-13

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

And he said in his letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:2

² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

Now look at v16:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Remember, as we read the Bible with intentionality, we consider the setting. Paul is writing to Roman church, located in the capital of the Roman empire, where all the pomp, lavishness, and indulgence of the Roman culture was on full display. This was an arrogant culture that looked down on other cultures. It would be easy for a Christian to feel timid about a religion where its Messiah came in meekness and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

So Paul went right after it...*I am not ashamed of the Gospel!*

Question: *Are we ashamed of the Gospel?*

We may not blatantly show shame, but are we free to tell others about Christ, or are we embarrassed?

Did you know Jesus said:

Matthew 10:33

³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Yikes! Now notice what Paul says:

because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

The Gospel is the power that brings salvation – period.

Nothing else can save us!

Also notice he says *first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

What does that mean? Especially when you consider

Romans 2:11

¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

What is going on with that? Is it a contradiction?

It was God’s intent that the world be evangelized through the Jewish nation.

However, as we know, they didn’t receive Him:

John 1:10-13

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

And then Paul completes the statement in Romans 1 by explaining the Gospel in one sentence:

¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Faith: to all who did receive him, who believed in his name.

The salvation story is all about faith!

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

This tells me that we don't bring anything to the table. It is not our knowledge or good behavior, or even our promises to God.

So what is faith?

Faith is simply taking God at His Word.

And His Word says:

Romans 10:9

⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Also: *Faith is a confident trust in God's power.*

Do you have confidence in God's power?

Gospel: (Of course it means the teachings of Christ, it means anything that is true. But in its simplicity, it means) *The good news.*

And good news spreads, amen?

ng Paul wrote this letter, in part, to introduce himself to the Roman church. He had never been there, but was planning to go there soon. He wanted to send a letter to share his heart. Scholars point out that this wasn't written in the form of a typical letter, but instead, was written more as a statement of the doctrine of the gospel.

As we said, it was written from Corinth, while Paul awaited his trip to Jerusalem. None of the apostles had been to Rome yet. So how did the church form? It is believed the church was formed by Jews who had been in Jerusalem during the great outpouring in Acts 2.

Let's take a look at that:

Acts 2:1-12

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both

Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

This shows the dynamic nature of the Gospel. It can’t be stopped! Romans who were there at Pentecost caught the fire and took it back to Rome with them. They started a church, and apparently, were flourishing.

No formal training. No denominational affiliation. No special funding by a mega church sponsoring them. They had the simple Gospel message...and what does *Gospel* mean?

Gospel: (Of course it means the teachings of Christ, it means anything that is true. But in its simplicity, it means) *The good news*.

And good news spreads, amen?

As we read the Book of Romans, we want to look for takeaways...it will spur us to ask questions:

Do we believe God gave his Son? Do we believe the gospel message in its entirety? Do we really believe God will work all things for our good? *All things!*

Can we really trust Him in our trials? Is He really using our trials to produce something good in our lives? Will we really see victory in our lives?

Spoiler alert...the answer is in the apex, the Mount Everest of Romans:

Romans 8:31-32

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

In other words...God already did the hardest thing...giving us His own Son as a sacrifice for our sins and failures. If He did that, He can surely handle our life problems.

So as we go through the Book of Romans...I encourage you to examine your own relationship to the Lord and recommit yourself to a deeper understanding of the sovereignty of God and your desperate need for His salvation. Strive to be more Spirit-led in your life.

With this in mind, let's begin.

Romans 1:1-7

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Right out of the chute, he identifies the author of Romans as himself.

And then notice he calls himself a servant. Did something get lost in translation there? Servant?

Peter uses the same word as he begins his letter in 2 Peter

¹ Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ...

The Greek word here is *doulos*, which means (drum roll)...servant.

And specially, a bond servant, which means: *A person in bondage. One who belongs to another.*

i.e. a slave

A slave? Really? Is that even healthy to call yourself a slave? Is that false humility? *Why a slave?*

Well, first of all, Paul is demonstrating a basic definition of what a slave is:

You are a slave to that which you obey.

Jesus Himself said:

John 8:34

³⁴ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

And secondly, it helps to remember the audience...the Roman church. As Roman citizens, they knew about the idea of slaves. Slaves were a common part of the Roman culture...the idea of being owned by someone. Slaves were bought and sold like property. In fact, allowing yourself to become a slave to someone was a common way of paying off a debt.

So Paul, using a familiar term, is in essence saying, *I am not my own - I belong to Jesus Christ.*

Is that true for you? Can you say that in all honesty?

Let's say it together: *I am not my own - I belong to Jesus Christ.*

He reflects that thought in his epistle to the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

And therefore: *We are not our own – and we are not on our own.*

Let's jump to chapter 6 for a moment where Paul talks more about this:

Romans 6:11-23

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

(Now notice, he talks of being slaves to righteousness)

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to

sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So much rich doctrine in the Book of Romans.

And also notice, he calls himself an apostle:

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

We just saw that Peter used the same term:

¹ Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ...

Apostle: A special messenger, personally chosen representative, of Jesus Christ.

That's a pretty important position. Special messenger...a chosen representative of Jesus. Wow!

That's the kind of stuff that gets landmarks and buildings named after you, right?

Like St Paul's Bay, St Paul's Cathedral, St Petersburg Russia, St Peters Basilica in Rome.

Pretty impressive...I'll bet Paul and Peter would be proud, huh?

No...these men who encountered Jesus Christ, and devoted themselves to serving Him...they called themselves slaves...servants.

Paul said:

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It is all about Jesus, and His Gospel!

Getting back to Romans 1, look what Paul says next in his introduction:

*¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and **set apart for the gospel of God**—*

Set apart for the Gospel. Set apart by whom? By Jesus Himself.

Set apart, sanctified, consecrated, devoted to His service.

And is that only true for Paul? When Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, Jesus said to him:

Acts 26:15-18

¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Can you say this with me: *I am sanctified and set apart by Jesus, for Jesus.*

And what was Paul set apart for? The gospel.

¹ *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—*

The good news of Jesus Christ. And then he goes on to say:

² *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures* ³ *regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,* ⁴ *and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.* ⁵ *Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.* ⁶ *And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (so we see the Roman church was heavily Gentile, with some Jews...because they were in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival)*

⁷ *To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

That is some opening greeting to a letter. We'll stop there for tonight.

Paul writes this letter to Rome, at least in part, as an introduction to them. He had never been in Rome but was hoping to stop there for a while on a future trip to Spain (Romans 15:23-24). According to Bill Mounce, in “The New American Commentary on Romans,” it is likely that he was looking for some support from this church as he ventured further and further to the west.

This letter would appear to have been written at the end of his third missionary journey. In Romans 15:25-29 he tells the Romans that he is on his way to Jerusalem with a gift from the believers in Greece and that once he finishes that he plans on heading to Rome and then Spain. It is commonly accepted, according to Moo, that Paul wrote this letter during the three months he was in Corinth, as recorded in Acts 20:2-3.

Main Theme and Purpose of Romans

It is hard to know definitively what Paul’s purpose was in writing this letter. It likely was a combination of things that prompted its writing. Among these would be his upcoming trip to Spain. He was planning to pass through Rome on the way and seemed hopeful of support while there. And it may well be, as Mounce says, that he was looking for a longer-term relationship with them as he worked in Spain – a relationship like what he had enjoyed with Antioch while working in the eastern part of the empire.

In connection with a possible hope for support, Paul may well have been laying out the gospel he preached. There were many that Paul had contended with over the years who may have been spreading falsehood about him (see [Rom. 3:8](#)). So, this letter could have been at least in part to prove his orthodoxy. And, finally, chapters 14 and 15 also point to there being problems within the church that he was hoping to be able to correct.

The theme of Romans has been a topic of debate over the centuries. Some claim it to be [justification](#) by faith. Others feel that it primarily concerns union with Christ. And still others see the theme as incorporating [Gentiles](#) into God’s people within the continuity of salvation history.

Moo argues that the theme of Romans is the gospel. He also says that “The bulk of Romans focuses on how God has acted in Christ to bring the *individual* sinner into a new relationship with himself (chaps. [1-4](#)), to provide for that *individual’s* eternal

life in glory (chaps. 5-8), and to transform that *individual's* life on earth now (12:1-15:13)."

What Can We Learn from Romans for Today?

While the culture of the first-century Roman world is different than today, what Paul has to say is still extremely relevant. Paul's focus in Romans is on two aspects of salvation.

The first aspect concerns how we can be in right standing before God. Paul tells us that justification (being declared righteous) is by faith alone, apart from any action on our part ([Rom. 3:28](#)); that our faith is to be in Jesus ([Rom. 3:26](#)); and when one places their faith in Christ, the righteousness of God is imputed to their account ([Rom. 3:21-22](#)). Right standing, or justification, is a gracious gift of God, given to us through faith. It is not something we either earn or deserve.

The second aspect of salvation Paul discusses is frequently called sanctification. It is an ongoing walk with the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes the importance of this in chapter 8. And he provides practical instruction for how to walk with the Spirit in [Romans 12:1-15:13](#).

The book was probably written in the early spring of a.d. 57. Very likely Paul was on his third missionary journey, ready to return to Jerusalem with the offering from the mission churches for poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem (see [15:25-27](#) and notes). In [15:26](#) it is suggested that Paul had already received contributions from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, so he either was at Corinth or had already been there. Since he had not yet been at Corinth (on his third missionary journey) when he wrote 1 Corinthians (cf. [1Co 16:1-4](#)) and the collection issue had still not been resolved when he wrote 2 Corinthians ([2Co 8-9](#)), the writing of Romans must follow that of 1,2 Corinthians (dated c. 55).

The most likely place of writing is either Corinth or Cenchrea (about six miles away) because of references to Phoebe of Cenchrea (see [16:1](#) and note) and to Gaius, Paul's host (see [16:23](#) and note), who was probably a Corinthian (see [1Co 1:14](#)). Erastus (see [16:23](#) and note) may also have been a Corinthian (see [2Ti 4:20](#)).

Recipients

The original recipients of the letter were the people of the church at Rome ([1:7](#)), who were predominantly Gentile. Jews, however, must have constituted a

substantial minority of the congregation (see [4:1](#); chs. [9](#) - [11](#); see also note on [1:13](#)).

Paul's primary theme in Romans is the basic gospel, God's plan of salvation and righteousness for all humankind, Jew and Gentile alike (see [1:16-17](#) and notes). Although justification by faith has been suggested by some as the theme, it would seem that a broader theme states the message of the book more adequately. "Righteousness from God" ([1:17](#)) includes justification by faith, but it also embraces such related ideas as guilt, sanctification and security.

Purpose

Paul's purposes for writing this letter were varied:

1. He wrote to prepare the way for his coming visit to Rome and his proposed mission to Spain ([1:10-15](#); [15:22-29](#)).
2. He wrote to present the basic system of salvation to a church that had not received the teaching of an apostle before.
3. He sought to explain the relationship between Jew and Gentile in God's overall plan of redemption. The Jewish Christians were being rejected by the larger Gentile group in the church (see [14:1](#) and note) because the Jewish believers still felt constrained to observe dietary laws and sacred days ([14:2-6](#)).

Occasion

When Paul wrote this letter, he was probably at Corinth (see [Ac 20:2-3](#) and notes) on his third missionary journey. His work in the eastern Mediterranean was almost finished (see [15:18-23](#)), and he greatly desired to visit the Roman church (see [1:11-12](#); [15:23-24](#)). At this time, however, he could not go to Rome because he felt he must personally deliver the collection taken among the Gentile churches for the poverty-stricken Christians of Jerusalem (see [15:25-28](#) and notes). So instead of going to Rome, he sent a letter to prepare the Christians there for his intended visit in connection with a mission to Spain (see [15:23-24](#) and note on [15:24](#)). For many years Paul had wanted to visit Rome to minister there (see [1:13-15](#)), and this letter served as a careful and systematic theological introduction to that hoped-for personal ministry. Since he was not acquainted directly with the Roman church, he says little about its problems (but see [14:1](#) -- [15:13](#); cf. also [13:1-7](#); [16:17-18](#)).

Content

Paul begins by surveying the spiritual condition of all people. He finds Jews and Gentiles alike to be sinners and in need of salvation. That salvation has been provided by God through Jesus Christ and his redemptive work on the cross. It is a provision, however, that must be received by faith -- a principle by which God has always dealt with humankind, as the example of Abraham shows. Since salvation is only the beginning of Christian experience, Paul moves on to show how believers are freed from sin, law and death -- a provision made possible by their union with Christ in both death and resurrection and by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul then shows that Israel too, though presently in a state of unbelief, has a place in God's sovereign redemptive plan. Now she consists of only a remnant, allowing for the conversion of the Gentiles, but the time will come when "all Israel will be saved" (11:26; see note there). The letter concludes with an appeal to the readers to work out their Christian faith in practical ways, both in the church and in the world. None of Paul's other letters states so profoundly the content of the gospel and its implications for both the present and the future.

Special Characteristics

1. *The most systematic of Paul's letters.* It reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter.
2. *Emphasis on Christian doctrine.* The number and importance of the theological themes touched upon are impressive: sin and death, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, resurrection and glorification.
3. *Widespread use of OT quotations.* Although Paul regularly quotes from the OT in his letters, in Romans the argument is sometimes carried along by such quotations (see especially chs. 9 - 11).
4. *Deep concern for Israel.* Paul writes about her present status, her relationship to the Gentiles and her final salvation.