***Romans***

We are about to embark on a journey through Paul’s letter to the Romans. While it is written after Thessalonians, Corinthians and Galatians, it is the first of his letters in the canon, in part because it is the longest, weightiest and most influential. Paul writes this letter to the church in Rome, a congregation that had been established by Hebrew Christians. We know from Acts 2:10 that among those who witnessed the events of Pentecost were ‘visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes.’ These people heard Peter’s sermon and given their special mention in the text, may suggest a very early transmission of the gospel to Rome.

In Acts 18:2 there is reference to the Jewish expulsion from Rome by the Emperor Claudius (41-54). The historian Suetonius records that this action was because of “disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” Since confusion over ‘i’ and ‘e’ was common in Latin renditions of Greek, it is not a stretch to believe the Roman Jews had become agitated over the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ in their midst (consider Acts 18:1-18). Nero allowed the Jews back in after Claudius’ death in 54, but then persecuted the Christians following the great fire of Rome in 64.

Scholars believe Paul wrote the letter sometime between 54-58, most likely while in Corinth in early 57 (16:1,2 mention Phoebe from near Corinth and Gaius, one of the most prominent converts in the Corinthian church). He writes in anticipation of going to Rome, and given the nearly 2 years it took to convey the gospel in Ephesus there is a desire for them to hear the gospel message and digest it before his arrival. The primary audience is the gentiles (1:14). There is much more speculation about his plans for Spain, anticipating difficulty in traveling back to Judea before coming to Rome. He may have considered that he might not live to declare the gospel in the west. These different considerations all play into his decision to write a systematic letter to the church in order that it may continue to carry out his work.

We could devote much more time to introducing themes that carry through this book, but perhaps a better conclusion to this introduction is to consider the impact of this book on the history of the Church. In 386 Augustine picked up this scroll and upon reading Romans 13:13b-14 wrote, ‘No further would I read, nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.’ In 1513, Martin Luther was attracted to Romans 1:17, but “that phrase, ‘the righteousness of God’ stood in the way of my understanding. Night and day I pondered until… I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith.” On May 24 1738 John Wesley was reading Luther’s Preface to Romans, and the description of the change God works in the heart when he felt his own heart strangely warmed. “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation.” In 1918 Karl Barth wrote an exposition on Romans in which he said, “The reader will detect that it has been written with a joyful sense of discovery.” So as other theologians have said in recounting this history and wondering how many other lives have been impacted, “Let the reader be prepared for the consequences of reading farther!”

**Chapter 1 – Beginning Outline:**

**Prologue**

**v 1** *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

The word translated ‘servant’ is Greek, (doulos) meaning ‘slave.’ Paul is completely at his master’s disposal. It highlights from the very beginning his own understanding of his position in the kingdom as one not worthy to be called an apostle, and literally the ‘least’ on the kingdom. Elsewhere we will consider his self-understanding as one who persecuted the church and sought the death of those who followed Christ.

From this lowest of positions ‘slave’ he has been ‘called’ and ‘set apart.’ His Lord takes first position in all things and Paul lives only to His owner’s good pleasure. It is to serve the purpose of Christ Jesus as an apostle (one who is sent) to preach the gospel (good news) of God. This is not just the good news about God, but it is the gospel that is God’s possession, being and activity in the world. It is God’s plan of salvation that began long ago.

**v 2** *Which He promised beforehand through His Prophets in the holy Scriptures.*

This speaks to Paul’s high view of scripture as the very Word of God. It declares that the OT Scriptures (the only scriptures in existence at this time) find fulfillment and consummation in this new message of God that Paul has been set apart to preach. This plan of salvation is all of one piece (OT and NT). This statement is further amplified (1:17; 3:21; 4:3, 6-25; 10:5-20; 15:9-12, 21).

**v 3** *Concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.*

This begins a short confessional statement (3-4) which might have been as familiar to the Roman Christians as it was to Paul. Jesus, God’s only Son is the subject of this gospel of God. While Jesus self-designation was as the ‘Son of Man,’ He is called ‘Son of David’ (Mark 11:10; 10:47-48) and calls attention to Psalm 110 (Mark 12:35-37). For Jews, the covenant with David, (2 Sam 7) and the continuity of the OT royal line again ties together the OT and NT plan and gospel of God. The phrase ‘according to the flesh’ means by natural descent and is used again (9:5).

**v 4** *And was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.* A key to this message is that the three persons of the triune God – Father, Son and the Spirit of holiness – cooperate as one to bring about the salvation of a fallen humanity. Paul holds that the gospel of the Scriptures (OT) and the gospel he is preaching (the NT in formation) speak with one voice regarding the Son who is both true God and true man. His present exalted status as ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’ is brought about by the work of the Spirit of holiness at the resurrection when He is declared Son of God with power. It is not the first time He is declared Son of God (Mark 1:11; Ps 2:7), but at the resurrection it is *with power*. Jesus did not *become* ‘Son of God’ at the resurrection. During His ministry Jesus was the Son of God in weakness and in lowliness. In the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection the reign of God comes in a new and powerful way at the climax of His saving mission. This is what the gospel means, “Salvation from death unto life through ‘Jesus Christ our Lord.’”

**Week 2 – Prologue (continued)**

Back to verse 1: First word is self-identification: Paul. It goes on to give a self-description, which emphasizes the call. One of the most important issues in the church today concerns the attitude of scholars and church leaders toward Paul. Many express distaste for Paul, especially in regard to his attitude toward women. The gospels contain the words of Jesus. To many, this gives the gospels much greater authority than these letters of Paul, who is but a man. What does it mean to talk about the ‘canon within the canon’?

The OT prophet Jeremiah writes that God called him while still in his mother’s womb. Does Paul understand his call as dating to the womb? That would highlight the sovereignty of God, ie. God did not just look around after the resurrection to find a messenger. Instead, God guided Paul’s life through his Jewish upbringing and opposition to the church into his call into the preeminent position as an apostle to the gentiles. He became the most significant voice to give shape to the theology of the church. Consider Peter’s own witness concerning Paul’s writings (2 Peter 3:15-16) where he references the difficulty some have in understanding Paul, ‘as they do the other scriptures.’

After calling himself a ‘slave’ of Christ Jesus, he describes himself as an apostle. What is an apostle? What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? Paul was not a disciple, in a technical sense. He was not one of the eyewitness companions of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Not all of the disciples became apostles (Judas). Descriptions of the early church talk of the apostolic age, when the disciples were sent as messengers who were eyewitnesses. Yet, Paul was an eyewitness of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul’s writings give several accounts of this miraculous, life-changing event, at least in part as a means to establish his credibility. There where other witnesses to these things, like those who were with Paul on the journey, and Ananias who came to Paul and was a part of the miracle to restore his sight.

Paul was destined for this role throughout his life. His training in Judaism provided the necessary background to shape his Christian theology. It was God’s purpose to call the most ardent opponent of the early church, a passionate enemy of these followers of Christ, to be a slave of the gospel. Who is in charge? This is the sovereignty of God!

All of this factors into our understanding of the ‘Authority of Scripture.’ Muslims charge that Paul is the primary culprit in corrupting the early church and distorting and changing the message of Jesus from that of a prophet into the blasphemy that regards Jesus as God. Paul’s writings are all prior to his execution, which happened sometime after the fire in Rome (AD. 64) and before Nero’s death (AD 68). The charge is that the Christian emphasis on atonement and a heavenly kingdom comes only after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD. 70, when the zealots, and the earthly hopes of Jesus had been crushed.

**v 5**  *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,*

Grace is the most important word in this letter for us to understand. If you do not understand grace, you cannot understand Romans. Luther describes Paul as having that inner turmoil, and a conversion experience which Luther understood to be parallel to his own. Paul says that he was not moving in that direction. While Luther struggled through the great inner struggle with the law and his inability to live up to it, Paul saw himself as a “Pharisee among Pharisees.” Luther faced a great inner turmoil from his dependence and fear of the law. Paul loved the law. He did not fear it. Paul’s conversion was a complete reversal of everything his life was about. Paul went from being perfectly happy with the course he was on, to being one who from that point forward, lived with constant suffering and persecution.

In verse 1, Paul described himself as called to be an apostle. The grace he received was for a specific purpose, his calling and vocation as an apostle. This is all for His name’s sake (to the glory of God). Ultimately, I exist so that the name of Christ will be exalted. In Romans 9:17 Paul recalls God’s word to Pharaoh. God told Pharaoh that he had been raised up to make God known among the nations, for the sake of the name.

Faith is the means by which we receive grace. When we believe God’s Word, listen to His voice, recognize His authority and power, the change that takes place within us is that we desire to obey. The obedience of faith comes from our trust in Him. Paul’s particular mission to the gentiles is again in line with all that God has been about from the very beginning. “Behold, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” This specific mission outside the Jewish community or the descendants of Abraham, is a proclamation of God’s sovereignty over all the world, not just Israel. It is all for the sake of His name, to the glory of God.

**v 6**  *including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,* It is not just Paul who has received this grace. It is a grace being poured out upon people of every tongue and nation. It is a message, a gospel for the whole world.

In these first seven verses we have a summary of the entire message of scripture. The rest of the book will bring it from the macro-view into a much more detailed description of all that God is doing.

**v 7**  *To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

At the end of all this, finally in verse 7, we have the salutation and greeting. It is notable that this work comes only from Paul. Others of his letters contain words of greeting from others in his entourage. This is completely personal. It is written to the community, to God’s beloved in Rome. The grace he has received is not exclusive but comes to many, even in this the capital of the empire of the world. Besides the well-wishes, Paul makes a statement here about the ‘saints’, who like himself are ‘set apart’ for God, and especially are being made increasingly ‘holy’ by the Holy Spirit. As grace is the most important word in this book, Paul understands that everything that is happening to them is a part of God’s grace being showered upon them. In OT terminology, the beloved of God are the elect who are sure of these things in their calling. The word ‘saint’ transfers the OT understanding of the chosen people of God to this early Christian community. The last words are just as important. Mercy and grace come, not just as a spiritual power, but on earth the divine order of peace comes as a sphere of life that is open-ended and without fear. It is dependent upon the fact that God truly became our Father (covenant of baptism) and Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Week 3 – Prologue (continued)**

Further notes: **v 2**; Holy Scriptures, designation that reminds us why the Bible is so often called the Holy Bible. Emphasis in this verse is on the Word of God promised and fulfilled.

**v 3** The good news is about the Son, who is the central figure in the salvation of the world. Beyond the 2 Samuel 7 text, many others from OT that make this reference (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24). All three major prophets highlight this promise, and elsewhere in the NT are more references to Jesus as the seed of David. Remember the question about David’s son (Mark 12:35-37; Mt 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44) that references Ps 110. The words, “according to the flesh” imply that He is more than what He seems to be, that is, more than human.

**v 5 “**The obedience of faith” I have already mentioned this as a natural outcome of faith, but it deserves further comment. If we begin with Paul’s initial word of self-identification, *doulos,* it gives much greater strength to the importance of obedience. It is to see my purpose as that of doing the will of the master. We cringe at this, especially when we think of the history of slavery, and the evil behaviors associated with it. I mentioned before the importance of reading this in light of the story of the prodigal son. We are concerned with the character of the master. When the master is good and loving and concerned with our best interest, we can obey because we understand that the directions given are good for us. This is focused on God.

The other angle is about the difference within us. This is about faith. We do His will because we believe what He says. We believe when He tells us that He is for us and for our salvation. It is about truly believing His Word rather than our natural reaction as we find it in Genesis 3. “Did God really say?” Luther emphasized that true faith is a *Fides Viva,* a living faith, or a faith that actually acts according to what it believes.

In Romans 10:17 we read, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the Word of Christ.” This is faith, listening to God in order that we might continue to grow in our knowledge of God. In John 8:31-32 Jesus says, "If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In John 17:3, Jesus prays to the Father, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” If we truly know Him we will glorify His name.

**v 6** This letter is addressed to the Christians in Rome, but it comes to us with the same message. As you hear these words, you are being called by God. My initial notes talked about the message for the whole world. Here the emphasis is on personalizing the message. You, are the one addressed and Paul’s hope for those in Rome who read this is now for you. This is about the magnitude of the message being conveyed, not because it is the word of Paul, but because it is the Word of God to people in this world who are lost, under the judgment of God because of sin. It is a matter of life and death. We are not looking at significance in the size of this book, or the author, but in relation to the God to whom it points. Notice that this word ‘called’ is repeated, in vs. 7.

When we started looking at the impact that this book has had on leaders and reformers of the church in multiple generations, it is because they saw and understood the significance of the message that comes to us through Paul.

Our natural inclination is to think in terms of our freedoms and rights. The call to Christ is not about rights. The only secure argument for rights in relation to other people is that God has given them to us, that is on the horizontal level, in relation to other creatures. On the vertical level, what basis do we have for arguing for rights? If we, with our hard hearts, and stiff necks, have rebelled against our creator, what do you think we have within ourselves that we can rely on. There is nothing. That is what the words of judgment say. “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” We have no rights in relation to God. We have no basis for complaint about anything we receive from God. All condemnation from God is just and all salvation from God is grace. The only thing that can save us is a gracious God. We have no right to claim anything from God. The kingdom of God is not a democracy. The only thing we are entitled to, the only thing we have earned from God, is wrath. If you don’t get that, you do not understand sin. We can’t understand the gospel if we think we have rights before God.

We are called to belong to Christ. This brings us back to Paul’s self-identification. He knows that he is a slave. That is the proper word to describe who we are in relation to the sovereign, almighty creator of the universe.

Three underlying assumptions that we must accept to understand Paul’s argument:

1. God does the calling – You are the called of Jesus Christ

2. Not everybody is called – Only some are called

3. The call is effective – It creates what it commands

We will not come to the explicit description of these assumptions until chapters 8 and 9. It is good for us to know now where this argument is headed. Romans 8:28 is one of the most difficult passages in scripture for people to hear in the midst of suffering and adversity. “We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” It is a reminder that not all things are good for all people. All things work together for good for the elect, the chosen, the ones who are called by God. In effect it is telling us that the only ones who can trust in this word are the ones who believe in Christ as their savior and know that they do not live for this life only. The full realization of all that God has promised us comes only when we have passed from death into life. While we know that in faith the life we live now continues into all eternity, we also know that we still must pass through the transition from this world of sin and slavery, into the heavenly promised land.

It will be a long time until we get to Romans 8 and 9, but read over those verses (8:28-30) few times so that they can be in your mind as we read these earlier chapters. Paul’s understanding of grace was profoundly shaped by his own experience of God’s call. That call is to be part of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (Nicene Creed). This is how we describe the church, the body of Christ. If we do not out of faith, obey Christ, the apostolic ministry that is to be our new life in Christ, aborts. It becomes like seed (Mark 4) that falls on rocky ground, or the path, or the weeds, and may give the appearance of new life, but can never bear fruit worthy of repentance. The only future left is to be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:8-10).

**Week 4 – Chapter 1 – Prayer of Thanksgiving**

**v 8** *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.* It begins ‘first’ but there is no second. He addresses the church at Rome in the most personal terms. It begins with thanksgiving, acknowledging that it is God who is at work in the world changing hearts and creating His church. Because these Christians reside at the center of the Roman Empire, the things happening there become known throughout the Roman world. We should remember that perhaps 20% of the population in Rome were Jews or God-fearers, those who believe in the God of Israel. Events there are known, in particular when we recognize the expulsion of the Jews that took place from 41-54 A.D. (at the instigation of a certain Chrestus). This would have included Jews and Christians, as they were not distinguished as separate groups by the Romans until the time of Nero. Paul is happy with their faith, not necessarily their piety. He is simply happy that there are Christians in Rome.

**v 9**  *For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,* “For God is my witness,” speaks to a truth that is only known to God, that he is constantly in prayer for these people. These prayers are a part of his purpose, his service to God in the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel of His Son, should be understood in the same way as the gospel of God in v1. There is nothing superficial about Paul’s service. It comes from his inmost being. “*My spirit*,” reflects a heart that has been changed by God.

**v 10** *asking that by God’s will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you.*  Paul is writing this as the apostle to the gentiles, and out of his desire to come to Rome, even as he writes he is about to go in the opposite direction, to Jerusalem.

**v 11** *For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—* Paul is emphasizing his deep and strong desire, not to get something from them, but to give something to them. It should not be read as coming to give them a specific gift of the Spirit, but in the sense that their faith may be strengthen through his ministry.

**v 12** *or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.* It is not only the ones who hear the word that benefit from ministry. He does not want to be boastful or patronizing, Christian life is about relationship, and in any godly relationship there is mutuality. This is a simple truth. Paul will bring something to them, all that he is able, but will also receive from them in the strengthening and encouraging of his faith.

**v 13** *I want you to know, brothers (and sisters), that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.* While his words of intent may be seen as expressing affection, he does not know the people in Rome. Paul often uses ‘my brothers’ as a form of address (sisters is a modern inclusion), which implies the warmth of feeling he had for all who were kin to him in Christ. His coming to Rome is with purpose, that he might ‘get some fruit.’ His words seem to have a double meaning, that the harvest would be his gain and theirs. He had been the means of bringing people to faith in Christ elsewhere in the Gentile world. Now he looks for the same thing to happen in Rome. Paul had an extensive ministry, working among other Gentiles without exception. He comes to the church in Rome that also has many Gentiles and may even be predominantly Gentile.

**v 14** *I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish* Paul’s self-understanding, ‘a debtor’ suggests that his commission as the apostle to the Gentiles put him under an obligation to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, at Rome as elsewhere. There is much speculation in commentaries over the specific debt to which Paul refers. Thus Barclay says, “Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died.” Earle speaks of “a vast amount of unnumbered blessings he had received from God”[[1]](#footnote-1) Others reject this and understand the words in the sense “having an obligation to them in the sense that God has laid upon him a duty toward them.” It is significant that he speaks of being a debtor, not to God, but to the Gentiles. It is in this regard that Corinthians 4 (1st and 2nd) bring a clarity to Paul’s self-understanding. The debt is not to God because the gospel is a free gift from God. If it is free, then there can be no obligation or debt. The existence of a debt following receipt of the gospel would imply that it is not really free. Instead, Paul’s sense of debt is to all those who were more deserving of God’s grace and mercy, meaning the weight and gravity of their sin was less than that of Paul. For Paul, many in the world stand in opposition to God merely in terms of indifference or irrelevance to their lives. There are others who have been active opponents of God, but in Paul’s time he stood out for his opposition and hatred toward everything related to Jesus of Nazareth. Again, It is the wonder of how and through whom God works. To Paul, as chief of sinners, there is a debt to everyone in the world who was not as unworthy, not in such direct and absolute opposition. There are issues in this interpretation that we can talk about, but it is clear that Paul comes with an attitude of looking at others as better than himself. Consider the categories he uses. It is not only to the Greeks, those non-Jews of the civilized world, but also to barbarians, the uncivilized hordes. While he excelled in wisdom, he has a debt to those who are viewed as wise by the world, but also to those who are foolish. He refers to those who think they understand the world, the wise, and also to those who have no understanding at all. He is in debt to all people and wants to discharge that debt.

**v 15** *—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* Paul says here, that because I am bound or in debt to all men, I am ready and desire to proclaim the gospel in Rome. Whatever has prevented Paul from coming to Rome has not been his own fault. What has prevented his earlier appearance there are matters outside his own control. He will seize upon the gospel time and again as it is the one thing that matters in this world. It speaks to what takes priority in his life, and as he began in v1, “he is set apart for the sake of the gospel.” Why preach the gospel to Christians? He writes to his readers as Romans, rather than Christians. They have heard and believed the simple message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul comes to bring that message to other unbelievers, and to bring the full weight and content of God’s word so that they may become true disciples.

**Week 5 – Chapter 1 – The Power of the Gospel**

The thesis of the book is presented in these 2 verses. *The Righteous Shall Live by Faith.*

**v 16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Does this continue the previous thought, or jump into the argument? Harrisville argues, “Here, the introductions are gotten out of the way, and the apostle takes to the pulpit and launches into his theme without bothering with introductions or prefaces.” Others note the seamless flow of a subordinate clause, that he is eager to preach because he is not ashamed, because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

The first clause in itself is worthy of extensive study and explanation. *I am not ashamed of the gospel,* is a remarkably odd comment to begin sharing something that is held to be so wonderful. If you thought you had found the cure for cancer would you even consider being ashamed of sharing that good news? Many have hesitated to share the gospel because of fear to the reaction or response. We can get this in regard to all kinds of opinions that we express. Paul’s words have a much deeper significance, when understood in the backdrop of other statements in his writings that draw on even OT imagery (Isa 8:14, Ps 118:22; See also 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Remember the image from the Circus Maximus, Alexamenos graffiti.

Whatever the public perception of this good news, however foolish or scandalous, Paul is eager to preach it because it is the power of God for salvation. The immediate concern is the linkage between power of God and salvation. It is not concerned with how it works, but that it does work, and accomplishes its purpose for those who believe. Salvation is also a broad concept. We understand that not only the Jews, but even Jesus’ own disciples had difficulty in comprehending the salvation that God had in mind. Consider the question is Acts 1:6. Salvation includes the forgiveness of sin, and the themes of justification, sanctification, reconciliation, and redemption.

This verse ends with priority given to the Jews. They are the chosen people of God. Theirs are the scriptures and the history of living in close relationship with God since the time of Abraham. Jesus says, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). In the call of Abraham, God emphasized that Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). The covenant at Sinai begins with a statement of purpose for the Israelites. You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6) They are the people that serve as God’s means of making His name known throughout the world to people of every tongue and nation. This priority also has a downside. God is more patient with those who are far from him. In 2:9 Paul will also give the Jews the position of priority in judgment.

**v 17** *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* This is a further elaboration on the previous verse. The gospel means salvation for those who receive it by faith, because it discloses “a righteousness from God.” Paul depends here upon the OT scriptures (Isa 46:11-13, 61:10). God’s righteousness is the way he acts in maintaining the covenant (Ziesler). This is about the character of God, in that what He does and provides must be in keeping with His nature. The gospel would not be good news if it simply disclosed the righteousness of God. Such a message would not demand faith. In view of man’s sinful state, it could only create fear. If the salvation as God provides it and offers it is fully in keeping with His righteous character, then it has integrity. If it satisfies God, man can be content with it. God’s righteousness in this context, while it has an implied reference to His character, stresses divine provision.

What is meant by the twofold reference to faith? A longer version might read, “because the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel at the place of and tending toward (or, for the purpose of creating) faith.“ Faith is the place at which God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel. Righteousness belongs to God alone. In Plato’s book, *Republic*, righteousnessis the goal of life. That righteousness is obtained by a knowledge with which the immortal soul already comes equipped, and needing only to be recollected. To the worldly wise, this is the most eloquent and thoughtful statement of an opinion that has seized the human race since its beginning – righteousness is something to be achieved. The Christian faith stands in opposition to Plato and all the worldly wise. Righteousness belongs to God alone. That can only be comprehended in faith and it is meant to create faith in the hearts of those who believe.

This introduction of the theme concludes with Habakkuk. “The righteous shall live by faith.” The Christian is not only justifies by faith, but is also expected to live by faith in order to please God. This emphasis has its place, but only when the initial problem of the sinner has been met.

**The Wrath of God - Romans 1:18-32**

This passage has become difficult to even bring up in conversation with non-believers in our time. In September a new article noted that at Princeton Seminary a student had posted the ‘smash text’ on a school blog. The school response was that every student had to receive sensitivity training. The ‘smash text’ is the LGBTQ description of these verses from Romans 1.

The opening words strike at the difficulty for many in the modern church. When most want to hear about a God of love, Paul introduces us first to this God who executes his wrath upon a sinful creation.

**v 18** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Paul launches into a lengthy exposure of the sinfulness of Man. Until humanity is persuaded of its lost condition, it cannot have any appreciation of the good news. The first step in Paul’s demonstration that all humanity is exposed to the wrath of God because of sin is the assertion that we are liable to judgment because of the specific sin of idolatry. God’s wrath is not an emotion. It is problematic for human views of justice, since the condemnation is sweeping and comprehensive. Humanity’s guilt is associated with its fate. God’s righteousness is opposed when people bound or ban the truth. In this verse, truth is something specific that is to be known – *The Truth.* What is ‘the truth?’ It is what can be known about God. The truth has to do with the conditions that ought to prevail between God and man. But that truth has been questioned from the very beginning. “Did God really say?”

**Week 6 – Chapter 1 – The Wrath of God – Romans 1:18-32 (cont)**

**v 18 (cont)** The wrath of God is about God’s justice. If God is a God of justice, then sin must be punished. The scriptures reveal this truth about God. It is only when we truly recognize the reality of God’s glory and holiness that we come to a full knowledge of our own character and depravity. In Jesus’ high priestly prayer (John 17:3) Jesus prays, “This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God and Your Son whom You have sent.” How do we know God? There is general revelation in all of creation and the specific revelation of the scriptures. This general revelation is revealed from heaven in everything that God has made. One should note the present tense “is,” implies that God’s justice is always present. Schiller said, *“The history of the world is the judgment of the world.[[2]](#footnote-2)”* Karl Barth taught that the revelation of God’s wrath, like the revelation of His righteousness, occurs in the preaching of the gospel, which, at its heart is the preaching of the cross.

v **19** *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*

That which is plain is the general revelation that is available to every person, whether or not they have ever heard the scriptures or even God’s children the Israelites. This is also known as *‘Natural Theology.’* There is a strong line of arguments that reject the concept of *Natural Theology*, but a part of the argument rests on what we mean by this revelation. It is not a specific revelation of the God as we find in the Bible. Anything that we may learn from creation is limited to the basic awareness of a creator. *“The human mind perceives that whatever lies beyond must be the Creator, who alone should be worshipped.[[3]](#footnote-3)”*

Other theologians argue that there are no true atheists; that people are rebelling against the thought that they have to answer to someone. The denial of God is a lie. One of the most powerful arguments against God is, that if God is so good why is there so much evil in the world? Russian author, Dostoyevsky responded, “If there is no God, all things are permissible.” That is, if there is no God, then the whole concept of good and evil becomes meaningless. Any talk about good or bad becomes nothing more than personal subjective opinion. To call Hitler evil, becomes nothing more than a statement of personal opinion, while others will argue that it was a utopian vision trying to create heaven on earth, *“A Thousand Year Reich,”* or *“The Workers Paradise.”*

v **20** *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Psalm 8 is but one way we might reflect on this claim. (see Psalm 19:1-4) *“On contemplating God’s works, man can grasp enough of His nature to prevent him from the error of identifying any of the created things with the Creator, enabling him to keep his conception of the Deity free from idolatry.’[[4]](#footnote-4)”* Harrisville reads this verse as Paul writing a ‘legal brief,’ showing that God gives to humankind the possibility of knowing Him, in order that at the final judgment there may be no charge of mistrial. God may be perceived in His works, but the creature refuses Him reverence, commits idolatry and ignores His judgment. In other words, bringing to consciousness or reflection of what is before the eye – the created order, one sees God’s invisibility, His eternal power and deity.

v **21** *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* The wisdom of the world, which opposes God’s wisdom, embraces not merely intellectual learning, but a type of existence – the world. Though able to acknowledge God as creator and thus to honor Him, the world actively rejects such knowledge as is manifest in creation and attempts to create its own. Again it is not simply the possibility, but the actuality of the knowledge of God, which is asserted.

v **22** *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* (see 1 Corinthians 1:20-21) God makes folly of human wisdom, though here it is the route to folly that is described, not folly as the end result.

v **23** *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* Paul is shaping his argument after the biblical account of Adam’s sin. Adam was made in the image of God, but ignores God’s Word in order to be ‘like’ God. God’s glory, (the ‘weight’ of His eternal power and deity, able to be perceived by means of or in the created order) is bartered off not merely for a mortal, but for the likeness of an image of a mortal – for that which is twice removed from what is human. (Psalm 106 esp. 14 and 48, the golden calf) At the heart of the case is that the primary sin here is idolatry. The even more insidious result of rejecting God as our Lord is that we now take as Lord – ourselves! We are substituting the darkness of our own desires for the light of God as Lord of creation. It is the temptation to which Adam and Eve succumbed: the temptation to become God, and hence Lord themselves, in Paul’s view is the continuing root of our trouble. Idolatry brings in its wake terrible consequences, which multiply themselves for anyone who contemplates seriously the state of the world. The analysis of both human society and human nature enables Paul’s message to be presented to our world with considerable force.

**v 24** *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,* This is the first of three statements that “God gave them up.” It should be frightening to all when we recognize the full weight of God’s wrath comes not in fire from heaven, but in what many mistake as a sign of God’s grace. This wrath consists in God simply letting humanity have its own way. The punishment for sin is therefore simply sin. It is not wrath and punishment imposed as a restraint upon us, but permissiveness. God punishes sin by letting us have control over our own destinies. We are given freedom to do whatever the inclination of our desires. Our own present society resembles Paul’s description in these verses. What is seen as a celebration of life freed from the constraints of the Word of God is therefore a celebration of the visitation of God’s wrath upon humankind. Luther asked, *“What is more just, than that those who turn away from the glory of God should be dishonored, not only in their hearts (and this is idolatry) but also in their bodies?”* Sexual perversion is simply an outgrowth of the violation of the created order.

**Week 7 – Chapter 1 – The Wrath of God – Romans 1:18-32 (cont)**

**v 24 (cont)** The word παρέδωκεν, Paul uses when saying God ‘gave over’ to captivity those who turned away from him is used extensively in the LXX. God is said to hand people over to their enemies or to deliver people’s enemies into their hands (cf., e.g., Gen. 14:20; Exod. 23:31; Lev. 26:25; Num. 21:34; Deut. 1:27; 21:10; Josh. 7:7; Judg. 13:1; 1 Sam. 14:10; 1 Kgs. 8:46; 2 Chr. 13:16; Isa. 19:4; 36:15; Jer. 21:10; Ezek. 11:9). This is also true in the NT (cf., e.g., Matt. 5:25; 10:17; 17:22; 24:9; Mark. 14:41; Luke. 20:20; Acts. 3:13; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:20). The implication is that there is more involved than the natural outworking of people’s choices when they turn away from God. God Himself consigns them to captivity in their sins (Might we call this addiction?). Simply stated, this is not passive abandonment but an active consignment on God’s part.

v **25** *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.* This seems to be a direct reference to Genesis 3, “Did God really say?... …you will not die.” Adam and Eve believed the lie of the serpent instead of the truth of God and in effect worshipped the creature (the serpent) rather than the creator (God). Chrysostom comments: ‘Look how strong his condemnation is, for he does not say merely that they served the creature but that they did so more than the creator, thereby giving fresh force to the charge against them and removing any plea for mitigation’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Note that in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul describes people’s response to the gospel in opposite terms: “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” This verse ends with a typical Jewish/ biblical way of referring to God.

**v 26** *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;* (This is an expansion of the charge made in vs. 24, 25) This is the second time Paul says, “God gave them up.” The word translated here, ‘relations,’ is frequently used in extra biblical literature to denote sexual intercourse. The word ‘natural’ is used by Paul to describe what people are by birth (Gal 2:15, Eph 2:3) or the natural order of things (Romans 11:21, 24; 1 Cor. 11:14; Gal 4:8). Paul’s description is similar to many others in ancient literature, including Plato, Philo, Josephus, Seneca, and Plutarch. Chrysostom maintains: ‘But when God abandons a person to his own devices, then everything is turned upside down. Thus not only was their doctrine satanic, but their life was too.… How disgraceful it is when even the women sought after these things, when they ought to have a greater sense of shame than men have’.[[6]](#footnote-6) It is generally assumed this means female homosexual practice, especially given the words, “in the same way” used of male homosexual practice in the next verse. There is a strikingly egalitarian note in Paul’s treating same-sex intercourse among females as an issue in its own right and holding women to the same level of accountability as men. It is nevertheless clear that Paul’s choice and description of the lesbian example reflect confidence that his audience, shaped by a similar philosophical and religious heritage, “will share his negative judgment” ’.[[7]](#footnote-7)

v **27** *and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.* Adding to his statement about women, Paul says “men likewise” have done the very same thing. It is not the same physical act, but the male equivalent. In some ways this is a more difficult case given his cultural setting and the positive evaluation of homoeroticism by some Greco-Roman writers and its popularization among the Roman ruling class, including Emperor Nero. The link Paul uses is evidence that is involves the same ’passion of dishonor,’ which continues with his further rhetorical effort to establish the despicable quality of homosexuality. To be ‘inflamed with their lust for one another’ is rare and derogatory language in the NT, but heat and flame are typically associated with sexual passion in Greco-Roman sources. As if he has not made it clear enough yet, he gives a more graphic description, adding, “men committed shameful acts with other men.” They were handed over (by God) to the tyranny of their own lusts as a due ‘penalty’ for their ‘perversion.’ When we talk about healthcare in this country, and recently focused upon pre-existing conditions, we must also talk about the cost of care incurred from a whole host of self-inflicted maladies. Venereal disease or in common language, sexually transmitted diseases, have a huge impact on our society. It is a difficult topic, because which of us does not have self-inflicted health issues. As one who is over weight, I recognize that there are health consequences of gluttony. While these things may be difficult to talk about, there needs to be some acknowledgment that if one abides by a biblical sexual ethic, there will be little concern about contracting such things. It is not that it drops to zero, but that the others means of contracting these disease result in a statistically minimal population. The final phrase in this verse comes across rather weak, such that, “due penalty for their error” has been rendered by others as ‘the fitting wage of such perversion.’

I must note here that there are numerous contemporary efforts to achieve a new and modern understanding of these words. Those making the case for acceptance of homosexual practice within the Christian community argue that the true sin under discussion here is a very particular form of sexual promiscuity, that Paul is attacking because of its idolatrous nature. That line of argument tries to make the case that such practice done in the context of a loving and monogamous and committed or covenantal relationship does not come under the scope of Paul’s attack. This is where the bishops comments, “The biblical writers lacked our modern understanding of homosexual orientation” must be dealt with in our modern context.

How do we understand the inner-self? Must we accept every internal analysis and self-identification? Where are we at in our understanding of nature versus nurture? Would it matter to this discussion if a scientist identified a ‘gay’ gene? Finally there is the whole matter of ‘hate speech’ and how these verses have been placed in that category.

**Week 8 – Chapter 1 – The Wrath of God – Romans 1:18-32 (cont)**

**v 28** *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* This verse is probably most central to the arguments that these verses have nothing to do with modern committed monogamous homosexual relationships, or the whole concept of same-sex marriage, but is instead a polemic against idolatry. While idolatry, and the refusal to acknowledge God as God is at the heart of Paul’s case, the actions or what is described, as sin in these verses is still sin. It is God’s function to judge, but men have usurped that prerogative in order to sit in judgment on Him and dismiss Him from their lives. There is also the matter of what is in ones heart motivating an action, which can turn the deed that looks good to others as an external action into sin. Paul is not talking about anything that is remotely good. This is now the third time that Paul says, “God gave them up,” again implying that they are to experience the tyranny of their own sinful behavior. We might expand these words to say, “Since they did not think it worthwhile to maintain a knowledge of God, restraint is removed so that the bondage of sin might have free reign in their lives.” This is about the mind. It is about what we think and how we think. God has given us a mind that it might come to the knowledge of God and bring glory to God. Their minds are depraved, led by their own depraved reason, because they reject the God made known to them in all creation. In the Greek it is a play on words, “since they did not think it *worthwhile* to acknowledge God, He gave them over to the tyranny of a mind that was not *worthwhile*, a mind so debilitated and corrupted as to be an absolutely untrustworthy guide in moral decisions. God gave them up and they proceeded to do ‘what ought not to be done.’ When human thought loses its norm, it does what is improper.

v **29***They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,* Paul commences to describe the things that ‘*ought not to be done*.’ It begins with the general terms of the problem, every kind of wickedness (unrighteousness - ἀδικίᾳ), evil, greed, and depravity. Then he moves into greater detail. Most of these descriptions are self-explanatory. This third level of debasement moves beyond sexual activity, the misuse of ones own body, to a catalog of activities expressing hatred and hostility to others. Evil is filled with ethical overtones, signifying what is sinister and vile. It is the term used when the devil is called ‘the evil one.’ Covetousness or greed indicates the relentless urge to acquire more. Malice or ‘depravity’ indicates a condition of moral evil, emphasizing its internal and resident character or ‘the evil habit of the mind.’

It is important when considering this list, to recognize that letting us have our own way is not a measure of God’s grace, but the visitation of His wrath. The discipline, which does not let us do whatever comes into our heads, is not a form of evil, it is the very essence of grace. In that light it can be seen that to put oneself under the lordship of God is an act that opens us up to grace and protects us from wrath. It is that lordship whose discipline keeps us from ruining our lives with idolatry, and all the consequences of it Paul has been describing. The gracious dimension of discipline is a message that needs to be heard. Abusive discipline is not gracious, but lack of discipline is equally evil. (see Gal 5:19-21)

v **30** *slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,* The first word plays off of the previous verse, from ‘gossips,’ who whisper slander in the listener’s ear, to general slander which extends from the whisper to shouting from the rooftop. While whispers are more dangerous in their hidden nature to the overt public actions, all are vicious and ruthless. The God-haters designates hatred and enmity towards God. The next four sins seem to portray different and extreme forms of pride. Finally, there are two more independent thoughts that include inventiveness in relation to evil, and rebelliousness in relation to parents.

v **31***foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* This is the end of the list, four negatives that the Jerusalem Bible renders as, “without brains, honor, love or pity.”

v **32** *Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* As the chapter comes to an end, we have a concluding summary of the human perversity Paul has been describing. First, *they know*. There is knowledge that these people possess, this time ‘God’s righteous decree’ (rather than truth), that those who do such things deserve death. Later he will write, *‘the wages of sin is death’* (6:23). They know this. Their conscience condemns them. They know, but disregard their knowledge. They not only continue to do these sins, but even worse, they actively encourage others to do the same, and so flagrantly *approve* of evil behavior of which God has expressed His disapproval. Ambrosiaster commented, “*Their wickedness is double, for those who do such things but prevent others are not so bad, because they realize that these things are evil and do not justify them. But the worst people are those who do these things and approve of others doing them as well, not fearing God but desiring the increase of evil. They do not seek to justify them either, but in their case it is because they want to persuade people that there is nothing wrong in doing them.”* We have come to the end of Paul’s portrayal of depraved Gentile society. It’s essence lies between what people know and what they do. God’s wrath is specifically directed against those who deliberately suppress truth for the sake of evil. ‘*Dark as the picture here drawn is*,’ wrote Charles Hodge, ‘*It is not so dark as that presented by the most distinguished Greek and Latin authors, of their own countrymen.*’ Paul was not exaggerating.

There is much more modern commentary on the nature of the homosexual practice condemned by Paul. Did he condemn all forms of homosexual practice or only certain expressions of it? It is crucial to this discussion what he meant by ‘nature’ in this context, and in particular what he understood to be ‘contrary to nature.’ To summarize, Paul did not impose Jewish customs and rules on his audience. He addressed same-sex relations from a multicultural perspective of God’s created order. Nor was homosexuality simply a sin practiced by idolaters; it was a distorting consequence of the fall. Paul did not describe homosexual acts by heterosexuals. Instead he wrote that homosexual activity was an exchange of the created order (hetero) for perversion (homo), which is never presented in Scripture as an acceptable norm for sexuality.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Week 9 - Chapter 2 Critical Moralizers (2:1-16)**

Having declared the depraved Gentile world to be guilty and inexcusable, Paul now turns his attention to Jewish people. This is an understandable viewpoint, since the classification of the human race into Jews and Gentiles is mentioned on numerous occasions throughout the letter, and one of the apostle’s main purposes in writing is to demonstrate that Jews and Gentiles are equal in sin and equal in salvation.

There is some dispute of this view, as there is no explicit address to a Jew until verse 17. Thus many look at 1-16 as still addressed to Jews and gentiles alike. Some suggest that Jews are the hidden target all along, but that he implies a gentile audience in order to gain their confidence before turning the table on them in v17 and following. In the end it is a critique of everyone (Jew and gentile) who is a moralizer. (Think some of current religious practice described as *Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deism.)* Both groups have knowledge of God and both contradict that knowledge by their behavior. The judgment of God that is inescapable, righteous and impartial is upon all self-appointed judges.

**v 1** *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.* *‘Therefore’* ties into the next argument. Here is our human pattern. We are often as harsh towards others as we are lenient towards ourselves. He repeats ‘no excuse’ (1:20). Many suggest this is more directed to the Jews, because beyond natural revelation, they also have the Law and the Prophets. The ‘same things’ Paul describes are most likely pride and presumption. This relates to the Jews attitude of favored, or superior status as the chosen people of God that underlies so much Jewish disparagement of Gentile religion. They need the reminder of Exodus 19:6, where God said, “*Behold the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”* Their status is not about being better than other people, but simply the ones whom God has chosen to work through for the sake of all humanity. As a Jew, deeply embedded in their religious practice, Paul understood how they found ample reason to pass moral judgment upon gentiles. He will repeat the phrase, ‘to the Jew first, and also to the Greek’ (2:9-10), which in the end emphasizes that the Jew will face priority in judgment because they knew the law.

**v 2***We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.* Paul starts this with ‘we,’ to include his audience with himself. He presumes general agreement with God’s judgment against such evil is just and based on truth. What should come to mind here is the Lord’s Prayer, where we say, *“For give our debts and we forgive our debtors.”* We should expect before God the same treatment as we practice toward others. We also must acknowledge that as sinners, we are under the same condemnation.

**v 3***Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?*  Paul draws on *The Wisdom of Solomon* in these opening chapters. His portrayal of pagan idolatry echoes words in that book. Now he takes up other themes from Wisdom that convict the Jews for their moral bankruptcy.

*For thou didst test them as a father does in warning,*

*but thou didst examine the ungodly as a stern king does in condemnation …*

*So while chastening us thou scourgest our enemies ten thousand times more,*

*so that we may meditate upon thy goodness when we judge,*

*and when we are judged we may expect mercy’* (Wisdom 11:10; 12:22).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Paul agrees; ‘you do well to acknowledge God’s goodness to you in spite of all your disobedience, but do you not realize that his goodness is intended to give you an opportunity to repent?’

When God pronounces judgment on those who make a practice of indulging in sin, His judgment is based in truth. This is not about the gospel, but simply means that the judgment is reached on the basis of reality; on the facts of the case, not on appearances or pretensions of man. Paul is pushing the inmost thoughts of the Jew. It is clear that he understands their tendency to complacency. The thought continues in v4.

**v 4** *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* In addition to self-righteousness with its accompanying false security there is an ignoring and despising the fact that God, to be true to Himself, must bring sin into judgment. He condemns their scornful attitude toward God’s forbearance with His people Israel, as though that patience were but a confirmation of their security, and even a sign of weakness on God’s part (Ecclesiastes 8:11; also Rom 11:22). The words forbearance (tolerance) and patience are explanatory of ‘kindness.’ It is God’s self-restraint, a temporary truce. The patience is given for the opportunity of repentance (2Peter3:15). Repentance is only mentioned here in Romans. It is an idea always close at hand, but secondary to his primary emphasis on faith.

**v 5***But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.* Paul speaks bluntly and plainly in order to shake the Jews out of their lethargy of self-deception. The nation is inviting retribution by its stubbornness and impenitence, which is slowly but surely building up a reservoir of divine wrath that will be crushing when it breaks over the guilty on the day of reckoning. Remember also, these words are written just a few short years before the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This national judgment fits into a temporal understanding, but the force of Paul’s words point to something even worse than the events of 70A.D. The day of wrath is a reminder that every person will receive according to what he has done. It is human sin that attracts God’s wrath, such that we are storing up wrath for ourselves by our sinful deeds. It is also true that God’s decision to defer judgment to provide opportunity for repentance is in effect God storing up wrath for those who refuse to repent. It is important to know that we confess that it is Jesus who will come again and judge the living and the dead.

**v 6***He will render to each one according to his works:* Paul gives an exact LXX rendering of Proverbs 24:12. God judging each person in accordance with their works is a recurring theme in the OT (Ps 62:12, Pr 24:12, Isa 3:10, Jer 17:10, Hos 12:2, Eccl 12:14), the teaching of Jesus (Mt 16:27, 25:31f, Jn 5:28-29), and the writings of Paul (2Cor 5:10, 11;15, Gal 6:7-9…).

**Week 10 – Romans 2 (cont) God’s Righteous Judgment**

**v 6 (cont)** And other NT letters (1 Peter 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:12-13; 22:12). It is also a fundamental assumption in later writings of Judaism.

**v 7***to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;* ‘Well doing’ or ‘doing good’ in this context is unusual for Paul in relating it to receiving ‘eternal life’. Elsewhere it is more directly stated as a result of faith, for those who are already saved. The next verse puts this in perspective as Paul comparing opposites, the obedience of faith vs. obeying unrighteousness. Throughout this book Paul will make it clear that future justification does not depend on law-keeping, because obedience itself is a by-product of faith, where true faith and love exist, there will be ultimate justification. Paul also speaks often of the ‘glory’ in store for believers, in Romans (2:7, 10; 5:2; 8:18, 21; 9:23), as elsewhere (1Cor 2:7; 15:43; 2Cor 3:18; 4:17; Eph 1:18; Phil 3:21; Col 1:27; 3:4; 1Thess 2:12; 2Thess 2:14; 2Tim2:10). Paul does not explain in detail what this glory involves, but he is persistent in laying it before believers as a part of the reward for faith. C.S. Lewis talks at length about the complaint that the focus on rewards turns Christianity into a mercenary religion. It is Satan’s complaint about Job, “It is no wonder he worships you since you give him everything he wants.” Lewis responds that the rewards are all connected to our relationship with God. It is not as if we can have the rewards without the one who gives them. The prodigal son tried that but it only brought disaster. I keep repeating John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and your Son whom you have sent.”

**v 8***but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.* If these things constitute the opposite of ‘doing good,’ then by implication, ‘doing good’ must be understood as seeking God, accepting the truth of His revelation and avoiding evil practices – the opposite of self-seeking, rejecting the truth and following evil. Those who are governed by selfish ambition are pursing evil for their own purpose, which is ironically not in ones one best interest but simply following evil. They have rejected God’s truth, refusing to serve God, but they are still servants. Luther’s book, *The Bondage of the Will*, is an extended discourse on the slavery that comes to all who reject God. The result of sin is the ‘wrath and fury (anger)’ of God. This returns to the starting premise (1:18) of the wrath revealed against all godlessness and wickedness. Probably the clearest statement on what the ‘wrath of God’ means is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

**v 9***There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,*  This begins by expanding upon the result of God’s wrath, the distress and tribulation that will be suffered. More important to a Jewish audience would be the direction of God’s anger. Paul says it will come first to the Jew. Consider Leviticus 10:1-3 and the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. There are benefits to being God’s chosen people, in seeing God’s power displayed with ones own eyes. Yet that closeness to God brings with it higher expectations. The Israelites serve as a prime example of God’s wrath as they suffer time after time the judgment of God for their sins in a swift punishment the exceeds what God imposes upon other nations. The other nations, Gentiles who do not know God first hand, will suffer for their sin as well, but only after God has executed His judgment upon the chosen ones.

**v 10** *but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.* In 1:16 Paul stated that God’s grace and the gospel also came first to the Jews. They have a priority in blessing, but also in the curses. There will be no special consideration for the Jewish people when it comes the judgment. These words imply Paul’s words are directed to a Jewish audience, those who would expect to receive favorable treatment from God because of their direct connection to Abraham and the promises that define their identity.

**v 11***For God shows no partiality.* While the Jews get first in line treatment both to the good and to the bad, the final outcome is the same for all. Those who do evil will experience wrath and those who do God’s will receive blessing. This requires that we have the proper understanding of God’s activity from the very beginning. When God chose Abraham, it was not that he was better than other people. Out of all the sinful people on earth God chose this one man Abraham, and his wife Sarah, as the people through whom He would make Himself known to all people on earth. Genesis 12:3 tells God’s word to Abraham, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That is repeated elsewhere, especially at the start of the Sinai covenant (Ex 19:6), where God makes clear, “Behold, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” In this verse Paul is repeating the words of God that have been stated multiple times (Deut 10:17; 2Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19; Acts 10:34; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; 1Peter 1:17). In Matthew 5:45 we read, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.”

**God’s Judgment and the Law**

**v 12** *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* Because God shows no partiality, God will judge with an even hand both those who sin apart from the law (Gentiles) and those who sin under the law (Jews). Sin unchecked leads to eternal punishment one way or another. Gentiles will not be condemned for failure to conform to the law-code that was not accessible to them. All people will be judged by the light available to them. Living under the law was the chief distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. Knowledge of the law is not enough to be declared righteous by God. Paul is about to make the case that the Jews are guilty of disobeying the law, despite their possession and knowledge of it.

**v 13** *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.* Beyond knowledge, the law requires obedience. It is not ‘hearers,’ but ‘doers’ who will be declared justified (δικαιωθήσονται). This word for justified is used here for the first time in Romans, but it will be used again 14 times in this book. Most of those instances go directly to the point of being ‘justified by faith.’ While this may appear a contradiction from Paul’s later emphasis on justification by faith, one should see this as working toward that declaration. In the end, no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by works of the law, expect the one sent by God to keep the law, Jesus Christ.

**Week 11 – Romans 2 (cont) God’s Righteous Judgment**

**v 14** *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.* Greek philosophers had a theory of ‘natural law.’ Cicero writes in the century before Jesus:

*There will not be one law at Rome, another at Athens, one now, another later, but one law both everlasting and unchangeable will encompass all nations and for all time. And one god will be the common teacher and general, so to speak, of all persons. He will be the author, umpire, and provider of this law. The person who will not obey it will flee from himself and, defying human nature, he will suffer the greatest penalties by this very fact, even if he escapes other things that are thought to be punishments. (On the Republic [33])*

Jefferson explicitly names Cicero, by giving the ideas of the Greek philosophers the clear language of natural law, with a direct and formative influence on Christianity into the present. Can we make a connection between the 2nd tablet of the law and Cicero’s concept of ‘natural law’ (You shall not steal, kill, commit adultery, bear false witness). If this is the natural law of which Cicero speaks, then Gentiles who keep that portion of the law, while being a law unto themselves, recognize it as a natural part of the created order. In the previous verse Paul talked about ‘natural’ relations, being exchanged for unnatural. Male and female is the natural order, but people desire to do things their own way on their own terms, and in their rejection of God seek to act against the natural order.

**v 15** *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* Can we know what is just and right without the explicit command of God? Paul argues that this natural law is written on our hearts. Even if we do not have a written copy to hold in our hands, the requirements are in our hearts. We know it instinctively, but only obey it as it suits our own purpose. God can judge with impartiality both Jews and Gentiles, because even without the law the Gentiles know their guilt and the sin they have committed because of the law written on their hearts. Is there anyone who has never experienced guilt? What does one do with guilt? The emphasis in these verses is on judgment. God’s wrath is just because those who are punished cannot plead ignorance of the law. They know their sin and have not returned to God.

v **16** *on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* In thecreeds we confess that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. It may seem odd to us when Paul says, ‘according to the Gospel,’ that God judges the secret of men. It is not good news to us that God knows our inmost thoughts. Scripture tells us repeatedly that God knows our hearts (1Sam 16:7; Ps 139:1ff; Jer 17:10; Luke 16;15; Heb 4:12f). The good is that there will be no possibility of a miscarriage of justice. All the facts will be known, seen and unseen, including our motives. The good news of salvation shines forth brightly when it is seen against the dark background of divine judgment. We cheapen the gospel if it is only seen as deliverance from unhappiness, fear, guilt, and other felt needs, instead of as the rescue from the coming wrath. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, *“I don’t think it is Christian to want to get to the NT too soon or too directly.”* Until the law has done its work of exposing and condemning our sin, we are not ready to hear the gospel of justification. There is such a thing as false guilt, but guilt feelings aroused by wrongdoing are healthy. They rebuke us for betraying our humanity and impel us to seek forgiveness in Christ. Thus our conscience is our ally. In every human community there is a basic recognition of the difference between right and wrong and an accepted set of standards. This has important social and political implications. It means legislatures and educators can assume that God’s law is good for society and that at least to some degree people know it. It is not Christians trying to force their standards on an unwilling public, but of helping the public see that God’s law is ‘for our own good at all times.’

***The Jews and the Law***

**v 17** *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God*

The conversation now moves directly to the Jews. Their first objection to Paul would be that they, as the chosen people of God were no different than the Gentiles. Paul lays out Jewish privileges. Jews possess the law and live in a special relationship with God. To rely on the law and God’s revelation through it was both legitimate and praiseworthy (Ps 1:2; 19:7-10; 119). Remember, The Law for the Jews was not only the commandments, but the Torah, their scripture. It is the basis of their identity. Relying on the law and boasting in it is affirmed (Jer 9:23-24), but it must include living according to it. Paul is focused on their disobedience. (also Deut 4:7-8).

**v 18** *and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law,* Paul underscores the privileges of Israel when he refers to the Jews’ ability to approve of what is superior because of received instruction by the law. Later he will affirm their ability to test and approve God’s will as they allow themselves to be ‘transformed by the renewing of your mind’ (12:2). They possess superior knowledge of God through the moral instruction by means of the law and that also gives them the ability to pass this on to others (their priestly function).

**v 19** *and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,* Paul lists the abilities given through their privilege. An important part of this reminds them of their purpose as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. As God’s chosen they can guide the blind, and be a light for those in darkness. This is their role in relation to the Gentiles (Is 42:6; 49:6).

**v 20** *a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth,* The list of abilities continues with ‘instructor of the foolish,’ one who not only informs but disciplines and corrects (Heb 12:9). They possess the ability to be, ‘a teacher of children,’ because they have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth. The Jews had the potential because they possessed the law. Psalm 119 describes the function of the law in providing understanding and guidance for living, best summed up in 119:130.

**v 21** *you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?* They could legitimately take pride in this list if they lived consistently with what they claim. The primary charge becomes hypocrisy, since they taught others but did not teach themselves. They bragged about the law, but by disobeying it dishonored the God who gave it. This verse gives the first of the five rhetorical questions in a manner similar to OT prophets who accused the people of robbing God.

**Week 12 – Romans 2 (cont) The Jews and the Law**

**v 22** *You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples?* This continues the five questions, and the chief accusation is hypocrisy. Another question is whether these are all to be taken literally, or metaphorically? Is the adultery in actual illicit relationships, or is it directed at the adultery involved in their relationship with God. We know that the book of Hosea focuses on the sin of adultery, but primarily in Gomer’s prostitution illustrating the Israelites giving themselves to all the other gods of the Canaanites. One must take into account the primary audience for these words. The gentile Christians may not have understood all the OT allusions, where as the Jews certainly did. While the practice of temple robbery was well known in the ancient world, that particular practice would be considered extremely rare among the Jews. The likely focus is on an attitude that is not generous to God and the expectations of a life in relationship with God. This robbery includes any attempts to shortchange the temple tax, or among the religious leaders to use the temple for their own personal gain rather than the service of God. There is always a tension. What is proper compensation for work in the temple? A focus on the temple sacrificial system could give one plenty of evidence of financial irregularities. As we look at the church today, we have the same problems. What is our proper obligation to God, and to the body of Christ that is the church? We can talk about tithing and ones heart toward God reflected in our generosity toward God. The sinfulness of religious leaders can assist our stingy attitudes towards giving. Should our hearts be directed by God’s activity toward us, or the sins of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

**v 23** *You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?* For Jews, the possession of the law was a reason for boasting, not about themselves, but about the God who has blessed them with this law to regulate their lives and provide a discipline that helps to maintain a proper focus upon life. It was and is a great gift from God. What is reprehensible is to boast in this law, but then ignore it. Possession of the law is of no value unless one obeys it.

**v 24** *For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*  This same disobedience of the law, living according to ones own standards rather than God’s even while boasting in the law and this special relationship with God that profanes God’s name. What makes you a child of God? Is it simple birth or is it your behavior? A child brings honor or dishonor upon the family and their name by the way they act. The same is true for every Jew, whose existence is a witness to God, but a witness that brings honor or dishonor depending on their behavior.

**v 25** *Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.* In 23-24 Paul stated that disobedience to the law brought dishonor to God’s name. Now he states that disobedience also invalidates Jewish circumcision. It is noteworthy that Paul says circumcision has value for those who obey the law because of the way it will be relativized in the rest of Romans and Galatians. Circumcision is important because it is a sign of the covenant relationship with God. The physical mark of circumcision was emptied of its significance by their disobedience. In essence their behavior made them no better than pagan Gentiles.

**v 26** *So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?* Paul now completes the ‘turning tables.’ Not only is circumcision made irrelevant for disobedient Jews, but pagan Gentiles who follow the law are elevated to the position of children of God. They will be counted as members of God’s covenant people. We must be careful in regard to our understanding of what Paul means by keeping the law. It is certainly not an observing of the Jewish law that comes from Sinai. This is not Rabbinic Judaism, or any other form of orthodox Judaism. Paul’s new Christian conviction, that Jesus, who the law had cast out, crucified, and cursed, was the risen Lord in heaven, led him to a revaluation of religion, and in particular of the law, the basis of his own national religion. This is a radical change, not merely a new faith, and a new theology; in light of these he came to the conclusion that the old faith, the OT and Judaism, meant something different. It was not a closed system, complete in itself, requiring only strict obedience. For those who have eyes to see, it points forward to Christ and the Gospel, which was the power of God unto salvation – for everyone who has faith. The question is meant to call attention to the one who determines what is true circumcision. This is about the great final judgment of God.

**v 27** *Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law.* With an, ‘in your face attitude’ Paul goes on to suggest that the pagan Gentile will condemn you, the circumcised Jew. This is the first of three references to the Mosaic law as ‘the written code’ (2:27, 29 [letter or literal]; 7:6) in Romans. It is not Gentiles as judges over these Jews, but witnesses for the prosecution. Their obedience will constitute evidence of what the Jew ought to have been and could have been. There is much more thought about the identity of these Gentiles who keep the law.

**v 28** *For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical.* Paul goes into a more explicit explanation of what makes a true Jew and true circumcision. He first states the case in the negative. The important factor is not the external or physical. There is something greater that the outward and physical is pointing too. He is describing the difference between a ‘nominal’ Jew and the ‘true’ Jew. The ‘nominal’ Jew is described as ‘the one who is outwardly’, that is, one who is seen to observe those practices that characterize a Jewish person.

**v 29** *Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.* In contrast to the ‘nominal’ Jew of v28, we now get a description of the ‘true’ Jew, who is one ‘inwardly’ (in secret), that is one who receives the approval of God who knows the secrets of people’s hearts. Circumcision in the flesh is described as ‘outward,’ while true circumcision is a ‘circumcision of the heart,’ brought about by the Holy Spirit and not the literal, or letter of the written code. Later (7:6) he will contrast life and ministry in the Spirit with life and ministry under ‘the written code.’ Circumcision of the heart is by the Spirit, which means it is something that can only be done by the Spirit within the heart, in contrast to physical circumcision in obedience to the law. (see Jeremiah 4:4)

**Week 13 – Romans 3 God’s Righteousness Upheld**

Paul ended chapter 2 with a statement that might be construed to mean there is no advantage in being a Jew or in physical circumcision. He anticipates their reaction and begins by raising the questions he expects to get, and answers them one by one. These are not simply hypothetical, but reflect real objections he knows he would have had from his Jewish background. So he asks the questions, provides the response and then gives further theological and biblical evidence.

**v 1** *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?*  If he had given a negative response to this, it is likely this would have turned off a Jewish audience. He is not just trying to keep their attention, and follows with a number of reasons.

**v 2***Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*  Paul is emphatic, *much in every way!* This first reason, (in sequence or importance?) is a matter of great importance. Theirs is the scripture, given by God beginning on Mt. Sinai. To be a Jew is to be a member of Israel, the nation entrusted with ‘the very words of God.’ For Paul, pre-eminent among the ‘words of God’ entrusted to the Jewish people is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is now continued by Paul and the other apostles. To have the revelation of God’s will and purpose committed to them was a high honor, but if it was a high honor, it carried with it a high responsibility. If they proved unfaithful to their trust, their case was worse than that of the nations to which God has not revealed himself.

**v 3** *What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* Throughout this book Paul will say that many were not faithful. Here he says ‘some’ perhaps minimizing the offense, but in Rom 9-11 he seems to argue that most Jews have failed to respond appropriately to God’s word. In 11:20 he says of the Jewish people that they are ‘like branches broken off from an olive tree.’ God’s faithfulness will be seen despite Israel’s lack of faith. God remains faithful in regard to His covenant with Israel when He imposes judgment upon Israel for her unfaithfulness (the point of 4-6). Also, God will graft ‘branches broken off’ back into the ‘olive tree’. Paul sees this from first hand experience (1 Tim 1:13). He continues insisting that God remains true to His word.

**v 4** *By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written, “So that you may be justified in your words, and prevail in your judging.”* He makes a strong denial, *“By no means!”* God will be true to His word, faithful to all He has said or promised, and this fact must be maintained even if it were to mean that every human being is shown to be a liar (Ps 116:11). God is true to His word, not only when He blesses His people in accordance with His promises, but also visits judgment upon them for their sin (Neh 9:32-33). The OT Levites acknowledged that ‘in all that has happened to us, You [the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love] have remained righteous; You have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly.’ In support of this Paul quotes Ps 51:4 almost word for word. David confesses his sin and acknowledges that God is right in what He says and justified in His judgment of His servant. Paul draws from this quotation that God is ‘blameless’ in His judgments, that is, no faithlessness on the part of human beings will cause Him to be anything but blameless in His judgments. Chrysostom asks, “What does the word *justified* mean? It means that if there were a trial and an examination of the things which God had done for the Jews and also what they had done to Him, the victory would be with God, and all the right would be on His side.”

**v 5** *But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* Paul’s note at the end needs to shape our understanding of these words. This question comes from a human perspective that allows no transcendent good or meaning, in which the only authority is human and not from God. The essence of the question is this, if God created us, and our existence is for the purpose of showing that only God is true, is He not unjust to bring His wrath to bear? This question rests on the hinge of our free will, and moral accountability. It is a human question because it assumes that the same egotism, which moves humans, must also move God. The implication strikes at God’s integrity, corrupted by a jealousy for His own honor. The suggestion that God’s jealousy for honor, dignity, and integrity within Himself colors His ability to be just.

**v 6** *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*  Paul’s response to this suggestion is again, an emphatic NO! If God where unjust how could He judge the world? If the questioner in v5 were correct, then Paul says, God would not be God! It is a ***sine qua non***, (absolutely essential or indispensible) that God is the judge of the whole world. It is also a given in the OT that the judge of the earth will do right. To Paul this is a blasphemous question.

**v 7** *But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* Paul’s premise is that human sin and unrighteousness puts into bold relief God’s righteousness. Human falsehood puts into bold relief God’s truthfulness. This is just as inappropriate as the previous question. Instead Paul has in mind accusations that have been made about his own ministry.

**v 8** *And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), “Let us do evil so that good may come”? Their condemnation is deserved!* There are people who have claimed Paul is encouraging people to ‘do evil that good may result.’ We will see more of this later (5:20) when Paul refutes this view at length. At this point Paul simply dismisses the allegation with the response that those who distort the truth of the gospel will have to answer to God Himself and deserve condemnation for the harm they cause other people.

**No One Is Righteous**

**v 9***What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin,* Again there is the presumed Jewish response, “*Paul, you just said that there is an advantage to belong to the Jewish nation. Does it not follow that we Jews are superior to those Gentiles who lack the privileges we enjoy?*” With only slightly less emphasis he says, ‘NO’ again. The Jews have received greater advantages, but are in fact in no better situation than anyone else. The Gentiles have sinned, but then so have the Jews. All, Jews and Gentiles are bound to plead guilty before the bar of God. The situation is well summed up in the words of scripture.

**v 10** *as it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one;*  The OT citations that follow begin with Ecclesiastes 7:20. Paul adduces a ‘catena’ of OT quotes in which the general sinfulness of humanity is summed up.

**Week 14 – Romans 3 No One Is Righteous**

We continue in this ‘catena’ or scripture ‘florilegium’ (a cluster of scripture quotations) gathered under a single viewpoint begun in verse 10. All the psalm verses are from complaints against enemies, the most frequent style of individual laments in the psalms.

**v 11** *there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.* (Ps 14:2 and Ps 53:1) When one looks at the original context, it does not say there are no righteous persons at all. The wider context of Ps 14:2,3 speaks of evildoers being overwhelmed by dread while ‘God is present in the company of the righteous (4,5).’

**v 12** *All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.”* (Ps 53:3) While it says not even one, it then continues in 4-6 to provide a contrast with God’s own people, those for whom the psalmist longs to see fortunes restored by God.

**v 13** *“Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of vipers is under their lips.”* Again the full context of Ps 5:9 makes it clear that the psalmist is speaking about the wicked, but the righteous will find refuge in the Lord. The venom of vipers in found in Ps 140:3. The psalmist seeks the Lord’s protection from such evildoers, and is confident that ‘the righteous will praise your name, and the upright will live in your presence (13).’

**v 14** *“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” Ps 10:7*

**v 15** *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;* **v 16** *ruin and misery are in their paths,* **v 17** *and*

*the way of peace they have not known.”* Proverbs 1:16 and Isaiah 59:7,8 are quoted in these three verses. Proverbs 1, speaks of those whose feet rush into sin and who are swift to shed blood. Solomon warns his son against such people, assuring him that whoever listens to the Lord ‘will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm (33).’ Isaiah 59:7-8 adds: ‘Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know.” The context shows that the prophet is assuring God’s people that ‘the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear (59:1).’ It is their sins that have separated them from their God. The promise is that ‘the Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins (20).’

**v 18** *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”* The ‘catena’ concludes with a quote from Psalm 36, an individual lament concerning Israel’s enemies, but when linked to Isaiah 59 gives a summary of universal transgression, ‘there is no fear of God in their eyes.’ In Isaiah, the accusation against Israel and thus the judgment is softened by the promises that conclude the chapter, a breach in traditional prophetic style. Paul’s use and argument contains no relief, weighed by the criteria of works, such that no one escapes indictment and sentence. In Gal 3:22 Paul speaks of scripture as consigning ‘all things to sin’ and may have had in mind a cluster of verses as appears here. This section affirms what theologians speak of as ‘total depravity,’ not that man in his natural state is as bad as he could possibly be, but that his entire being is adversely affected by sin. Human relations suffer because society can be no better than those who constitute it. Getting out of step with God is the cause of conflict and chaos in human relations.

Paul’s purpose in listing these quotations is to say that, as a people, Jews are no better than Gentiles. Paul would certainly know of the many righteous persons spoken of in the OT, including Abraham, to whom he refers in the next chapter (4:1–25). However, it must be said that such ‘righteous’ persons are not the morally flawless, but those who have responded with repentance to the goodness of God. Not one of them would have been declared righteous by God because of their good behavior. Paul’s conclusion that follows in the next verse stands.

**v 19** *Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* Verses 19-20 are the closing statements of the indictment. Paul may be anticipating the complaint of Jews who question the legitimacy of the charge based on these passages because they refer to humanity in general, or if Jews, then those who by their godlessness are not representative of the nation as a whole. He reemphasizes that whatever the law says, it says to those under the law, in the broad sense of OT revelation. ‘Under the law’ is not so much that the Jew is under the law’s authority and dominion in a legal sense, but that the chosen ones are involved in scripture, which has relevance to their identity and activity at every point.

**v 20** *For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.* The verse ends with a clear statement on the use of the law. The quote is Ps 143:2, with Paul adding ‘by works.’ The most important purpose for us is in the way it shows us our sin, ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin.’ It is only when we know our sin and its consequences and realize there is nothing we can do on our own to solve our problem that we begin to look for help. This is when the Gospel becomes real good news for us, because it comes to us with the solution we need, salvation from our sin and from death. Protestant exegesis since the reformation has usually understood ‘the works of the law’ in Paul’s writings to denote works be which Jews attempted to amass merit before God in order to be justified. More recently Jewish scholarship has helped bring out a distinction from the idea of merit in Catholicism. Paul’s target was not Jews trying to earn God’s favor. It was the devout Jew who already reckoned himself a member of the covenant people and as such already accepted by God. The Jew was not appealing to perfect performance of the law, but to possession of the Torah as the badge of being God’s special people. They are special, but also sinning; and sin means that the specialness is of no avail. The limit of the law makes Christ necessary. Jewett comments: ‘The catena declares a complete betrayal of Israel’s religious heritage on the part of those who should be the first to embody it. Since the catena was probably created by Jewish sectarians, and was intended to buttress their claims against other groups whom they considered to be heretics, Paul has taken this weapon out of their hands and turned it back on its creators. With Paul’s elimination of the distinction between the righteous and fools, the catena relegates all Jews along with all Gentiles to the category of sinners and traitors, placing them on [the] same level as enemies of God’.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Week 15 – Romans 3 The Righteousness of God Through Faith**

**v 21***But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* From 1:18 – 3:20 Paul has argued that the whole world is accountable to God and that no one will be justified by works of the law. Now Paul begins to show that God has revealed His righteousness apart from the law for all who believe. This is not something new, but has been a part of the witness of the Law and the prophets from the very beginning. Both Jews and Gentiles will be justified by grace, thus removing all grounds for boasting. This is God’s righteousness.

The Roman poet Horace, laying down some guidelines for writers of tragedies, criticizes those who resort too readily to the device of a *deus ex machina* (god from the machine) to solve the knotty problems which have developed in the course of the plot. *“Do not bring a god on to the stage, unless the problem is one that deserves a god to solve it.”* Luther took up these words and applied them to the forgiveness of sins: “here,” he said, “is a problem which needs God to solve it.”

**v 22***the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:* The righteousness of God that is now revealed is His saving righteousness, His saving action in Jesus Christ by which human sin is atoned for so that humanity’s broken relationship with God may be restored. This is only one aspect of the righteousness of God, but of most importance to humanity, because it is our only hope. The emphasis is on this righteousness that is ‘apart from the law.’ It is made known in Jesus Christ. All that is required of sinful men and women is that they should embrace, by faith, what God’s grace has provided. The indication is that both Jew and Gentile may become recipients of the righteousness made available by God’s saving righteousness ‘apart from the law.’ There is no distinction reemphasizes the point that in the crucial matter of ones standing before God, both Jew and Gentile are in the same place. There is no difference in respect to sin, and so there is also no difference in respect of the mercy of God. This point is made again in 10:12.

**v 23***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*  The image of God in which man was created was believed to involve a share in the divine glory, which was forfeited through sin. The words of Is 43:7, ‘whom I created for my glory’ came to be applied to humanity in general. The ‘hope of sharing the glory of God’ awaits believers in the coming age (5:2). Every human being, as an individual, has sinned. Paul has already gone to great length to establish this point, but here reinforces the elimination of any difference between Jew and Gentile.

**v 24***and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* Paul’s hope, before he became a Christian, was that by his perseverance in observing the law of God, he might at length be pronounced righteous by God when he stood before the judgment seat. In this new way of righteousness apart from the law, the procedure is reversed: God pronounces believers righteous at the beginning of their course, not at the end. Since it is at the beginning, the righteousness declaration cannot be on the basis of works that have not yet been done. This is the essence of God’s ‘free grace,’ He pardons our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. This plays to the matter of assurance, since when it is a free gift, I know that I do not have to worry about whether I have done enough to make the grade. If God in sheer grace assures me of His acceptance in advance, and I gladly embrace His assurance, then I can go on to do His will without worrying whether I am doing it adequately. In fact, to the end I know I shall be an ‘unprofitable servant.’ but I know whom I have believed. The word ‘redemption’ implies several different types of payments. This includes the redemption of the firstborn by the payment of the redemption price, an individual’s redemption from slavery also by the payment of a redemption price, as well as Israel’s redemption from slavery in Egypt and her exile. More important for our purposes, however, is what may be gleaned from the contexts in which Paul uses the verb ‘to redeem’ and the noun ‘redemption’. He uses the verb ‘to redeem’ when speaking of people being delivered ‘from all wickedness’ (Tit 2:14). In its context here it appears to mean deliverance from the power of sin, from slavery to sin.[[11]](#footnote-11) For Paul then, redemption is primarily freedom from sin’s penalty and power, and this in the present time. While experienced in the present, it is fully realized on the last day and will include the ‘redemption of our bodies,’ that is, resurrection to immortality.

**v 25***whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* ‘Propitiation’ is the sacrifice of atonement. It is the removal of guilt and the purifying of the sinner. It is also the appeasing of God’s wrath toward sinners, and as an allusion to the mercy seat in the tabernacle. This is not done in pagan terms of overcoming the wrath of a hostile god. It is God Himself who takes the initiative in providing His own Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The prime actor in Christ’s cross was God. Christ was God reconciling. He was God doing the very best for man, and not man doing anything for God. Pardon, liberation, and atonement all are made available to men and women by His free initiative and may be appropriated by faith. Faith in this sense is not a kind of work that is specially meritorious, it is a simple open-hearted attitude toward God, that takes God at His word and accepts His grace.

This was to show God’s righteousness, that is, ‘to demonstrate that God was not unrighteous when He passed over sins committed in earlier days, in the period of His forbearance.’ The redemption accomplished by Christ has retrospective as well as prospective efficacy. His atonement avails for the whole human family; ‘He is the expiation for our sins,’ as a later NT writer puts it (using the word *hilasmos*, from the same stock as *hilastērion*), ‘and not for ours only but also for … the whole world’ (1 John 2:2). With the description of the ages before Christ as the period of God’s forbearance may be compared Paul’s announcement to the Athenians: ‘The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now …’ (Acts 17:30). Although the problem in theodicy may not be as obvious to the modern mind as it was to Paul’s, yet to pass over wrong is as much an act of injustice on the part of a judge as to condemn the innocent[[12]](#footnote-12)

**Week 16 – Romans 3 The Righteousness of God Through Faith**

**v 26***It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* He repeats *‘to show His righteousness.’* There are two purposes. It begins with the character of God. He is righteous. Jesus in His life lives out the righteousness required by the law. He keeps the covenant of Sinai, decreed by the Father. God’s righteousness is vindicated and the believing sinner is justified. Jesus’ unique role is God’s representative with man and man’s representative with God. He is the great High Priest, the one intercessor between God and man. He fulfills all the requirements of the law and by that means, justifies those who believe in Him. Their uncircumcision will be counted as circumcision, (2:26-27). The Jews who sinned have destroyed their special place as the chosen people of God such that the physical circumcision is invalid. Paul is working toward the importance of faith.

There is a question as to which gentiles Paul has in mind when he argues (2:13-16) that the gentiles who do what the law requires put to shame the Jewish people who do not obey their own law. Is it simply some gentiles who keep some aspect of the law? Or is it gentile Christians, those for whom the Spirit has written the law on their hearts according to the promise of the new covenant? It is not generic faith, but only faith in God who sent His Son to fulfill the law for those who place their trust in Him. Jesus is the justifier, making just those who in their actions are completely unjust. This can only happen on the terms that God has set. *“There is no other under heaven by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

**v 27***Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith*. This is addressed first to the Jews.If salvation is for those of faith of both the Jews and the gentiles, then what becomes of Jewish boasting? In Paul’s writings there are both legitimate and illegitimate grounds for Jewish boasting. A list of legitimate grounds is found in 9:4-5. It has already been stated that their possession of the law and relationship to God is valid, but to boast of their works as a basis of justification is wrong. This boasting is not confined to the Jews. He is building the contrast between faith and works, not faith and covenantal privileges. Earlier Paul had excluded boasting in the law because of their disobedience. Now he says, it is not only because of the failure to obey the law, but also because the law requires faith.

**v 28***For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.* Paul begins this statement with the word ‘we.’ He is including his readers among those who have accepted this view. It is this fact that places gentiles on the same footing as the Jews. It destroys any claim that possession of the law or anything else Jewish, gives superiority over gentiles.

**v 29***Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,* To reinforce the point in 28, Paul asks, *“Is God the God of Jews only?”* The form of the question anticipates the answer. There is only one God, and He is God of all creation and the entire human race, gentiles as well as Jews. Despite the special place of Israel in salvation history, she cannot claim an exclusive relationship to God. We can think of numerous texts in the OT that are meant to reinforce this point, such as the whole book of Jonah.

**v 30***since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.* Continuing to reinforce this point, Paul adds this verse. *“Since God is one,”* which reflects the fundamental belief of Judaism, contained in the *Shema. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, the Lord is one”* (Deut 6:4). Paul also uses it in 1 Corinthians 8:6. Appealing to this fundamental belief, he argues that the one God will justify Jews (the circumcised) and gentiles (the uncircumcised) in one way – by faith. Paul uses the future tense here, suggesting that justification belongs properly to the end time, the final day of judgment, when God will rule in favor of all those who have put their faith in His Son.

**v 31***Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.* Paul now goes back to his argument in 3:28. If people are justified, *“apart from the works of the law,”* then the question arises: Do we nullify or invalidate the law by this faith? Paul’s reply is emphatic. “*By no means!”* Paul has been insisting that this is what the law and the prophets have been witnessing to from the very beginning. In the opening paragraph of Romans, (1:2) Paul says he was set apart to preach the gospel God promised beforehand through His prophets. Having forcefully rejected the suggestion, he asserts, *“We uphold the law.”* There are two ways Paul upholds the law even as he preaches justification by faith. (i) In 8:3-4 Paul writes, ‘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, 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’. The apostle implies that, while people are justified without having to observe the law, nevertheless there is a sense in which the law is fulfilled in the lives of the justified who live according to the Spirit. (ii) In the very next chapter (4:1–25) Paul shows from the law that Abraham was justified by faith without works and argues that this will also be the case for all who have faith in Christ, for gentiles as well as Jews. It may be best to say that in both these ways Paul’s teaching about justification by faith upholds the law: it enables a fulfillment of what the law sought to bring about in human behavior, and it fulfils what is foreshadowed in the law’s account of Abraham’s justification.[[13]](#footnote-13) Commentators who agree that justification is essentially a judicial verdict, often suggest that Christian faith is made to have its beginning in a fiction. We do not obey the law, so to treat us as though we are righteous amounts to the Roman Catholic argument against Luther. This is at the heart of their argument, that we must do our own good works, and results in the treasury of merit and all that is involved in indulgences. Paul says that the verdict of acquittal, understood in Jewish theology to be hoped for at the last judgment, is made when people believe. When justified by faith, as Abraham was, one becomes a child of Abraham and an inheritor of the promises God made to Abraham. Also, this is not just about the inclusion of gentiles, as Paul speaks of justification in many passages that have nothing to do with gentile inclusion (8:29-30; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:9; Phil 3:9; Titus 3:7).

**Week 17 – Romans 4 Abraham Justified By Faith**

Paul has already said that this, ‘righteousness of God apart from the law’ is attested by the Law and the Prophets. Now he goes to the beginning, Genesis, to show this more fully. His primary example is from Abraham, but he is also looking at David, both of whom are primary recipients of covenant promises. This chapter is an apology to Jews’ objections to his gospel (3:28). Abraham is presented as the universal father figure. His life provides the evidence that God shows no distinction between Jew and gentile in regard to salvation. There is continuity between God’s action toward Abraham and the way He now works in accordance with His gospel.

**v 1** *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?* Paul introduces Abraham, the one through whom God began His covenant relationship that is at the center of Israel’s identity. In Isaiah 41:8, God calls Abraham His friend. In Genesis 26:5, God testifies, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” If righteousness is by works, it would then appear that Abraham has more claim than most. He is obedient and follows God, but those works are the fruit of his faith in God. If he had not believed God he would not have set out for the Promised Land. *Our forefather according to the flesh?* To a Jewish audience, this is their identity (Jn 8:33). This opens the question of what makes one a descendant of Abraham (Jn 8:39-47). John the Baptist also makes this point (Matt 3:9).

**v 2** *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* This is a conditional statement, assuming something for the sake of argument. Some Jewish contemporaries of Paul argued that the sacrifice of Isaac gave a clear example of Abraham’s works. ‘Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested?’ ‘Joseph in the time of distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt’ (1 Macc 2:51-53). ‘He kept the law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with Him; he certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested proved faithful’ (Sir 44:20). Paul rejected all of this in 3:28, not just with regard to Abraham, but all humanity. When Paul adds, “but not before God,” it might be inferred that Paul is merely limiting the scope of boasting, that, while not before God it was reason for boasting before people. Paul’s goal, after rejecting the counter argument is to refocus on the role of works in justification, with the reminder from God’s view that we have nothing whatsoever to boast about.

**v 3** *For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”* This is the key verse in this argument, quoting from Gen 15:6. Paul has previously used this argument in Galatians 3:6. Here he returns to it with much further elaboration. As noted in v.2, Jewish exegesis interpreted this much differently. Paul stresses that this statement comes before circumcision, before Isaac, and particularly long before the law of Israel (Sinai). Gen 15:6 gives us the first use of the word ‘believe’ in the scriptures and it is done in relation to righteousness. Abraham believed God and the text says, ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Paul is emphasizing that Abraham has no righteousness of his own that would be the basis for acceptance by God. Later in Joshua 24:22-3 we find a critique of ancestors, including Abraham’s family. The next verse relates this to the idea of bookkeeping. By crediting Abraham’s faith as righteousness, God was accepting him as one fit for relationship with Him and choosing to take no account of his sin, and Paul makes clear in the next verses.

**v 4** *Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.* When people do a day’s work, their employer is obligated to pay their wages. In no sense are the wages to be regarded as a gift. These wages have been earned. They are a contractual obligation.

**v 5***And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,* This matter is different. When God justifies the sinner, He is like an employer who gives wages to those who do not work. It must be added that trusting God is definitely not to be regarded as a work performed. The description of God as one who, ‘justifies the ungodly’ is on its surface quite shocking. The OT emphasizes the exact opposite (Prov 17:15; Ex 23:7; Ex 34:6-7). One might add that these two verses (4-5) in no way imply that a Christian need not be concerned for producing good works. Paul is not contrasting the worker with the non-worker, but rather one who trusts in his own works as opposed to one who trust in God.

**v 6** *just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:* Paul is using a Jewish method of interpretation in which a word occurring in one passage is used to interpret another passage where the same word occurs. He is noting the similarity between Psalm 32 and Genesis 15 (Also 2 Cor 5:19). Abraham is linked with David furthering the OT support for his thesis of justification through faith. The passage about Abraham spoke of the blessing that faith confers, while this passage speaks of the evil that it removes, and thus the two complement each other.

**v 7** *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;*

**v 8** *blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”* 7-8 quote Psalm 32:1-2a. The psalmist uses parallelism with images that recur throughout the OT. Lawlessness and sin are synonymous though not as closely as just and right. The use of covered with forgiven equates to being pardoned and blotted out. The forgiveness of God is it not simply concealing something under the surface. The words should bring to mind covering, from the nakedness of Adam and Eve covered by the skin of an animal, to the blood covering the doorway and the clean robes and garments covering the dirty clothes of the prodigal or the priest. These two concepts are added to the counting or crediting that was the basis of the argument from Gen 15:6.

**v 9** *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* Returning to the argument of Abraham, another crucial question is addressed. What relationship lies between justification by faith and the rite of circumcision? This is of central importance to the Jew. Circumcision was the outward and visible sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. No uncircumcised man could claim any share in that covenant. Circumcision entitled Jews or gentile proselytes to all of the covenant privileges, apart from those who by willful repudiation cut themselves off from the covenant people. Think about the Passover and the requirements for participation. Every male participant must be circumcised. (Josh 5)

**Week 18 – Romans 4 Abraham Justified By Faith**

**v 10** *How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* Chapter 4 specifically looks at Abraham as an example to understand the work of God’s righteousness. When did that righteousness become Abraham’s possession? Paul considers this the decisive point in his argument, that Abraham was reckoned righteous by God before he was circumcised. The historical fact is that God’s covenant promise comes to Abraham before he is circumcised and 430 years before the Sinai Covenant. There is a significant problem here for Jewish rabbis. If Moses’ law was the divine law, how could Abraham and the other patriarchs have flourished without it? Many try to suggest that Abraham observed the ‘oral’ law. Philo of Alexandria claimed, “*Abraham observed the law of nature, and Abraham was himself a law; the Law of Moses is the copy of the law of nature, and the Law of Moses derives its specifications from those specific things which Abraham (and other patriarchs) did.”* In 4:10 Paul raises again this important question regarding the relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law, dealing in both Gal 3:17–18 and Rom 4:10 with the matter of timing. In both passages the apostle asserts that the larger context of Gen 15:6 makes it clear that God credited righteousness to Abraham before he was circumcised (which account of God’s crediting of righteousness is given in Gen 15:6) and *not after* he was circumcised (which account of God’s call for Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised is given in Gen 17:9–14).*[[14]](#footnote-14)* It is later rabbinic lore that suggested, “Abraham will sit at the entrance of Gehenna and will not permit any circumcised Israelite to descend into it.”

**v 11** *He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,* Jewish OT scripture traces the origin of circumcision as a religious rite back to God’s reaffirmation of His covenant with Abraham, as recorded in Gen 17:4-14. During Jewish history, it did not always have the importance represented by Paul. Greek influence led many to ignore it. Beginning with the Babylonian Captivity it gained importance as a national identity marker, it became greater after the return of the Jews to their homeland to reassert their distinct identity as a people. That reason also impacted later conflicts, especially when Greek rulers tried to forbid it. During such times it could become the epitome of being Jewish. Paul calls circumcision a sign or seal using a word most often used to indicate the impression of a rulers signet ring or official stamp that authenticated the contents of what was written. In 1 Cor 9:2 he uses it in speaking of the confirmation of his own apostleship. He asserts God’s purpose in the chronology of events. The order of events in history are meant to make clear that the fatherhood of Abraham is for all people, both circumcised and uncircumcised. Paul’s audience includes both Jew and gentile, and he might have feared the Jewish audience would see him robbing the Jews of both Abraham’s patriarchal status, or dismissing circumcision as a valid religious rite.

**v 12** *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.* Paul is affirming that Abraham is the father of the Israelite nation, and that circumcision is the sign for the Jews of God’s covenant with them. He is also insisting that any righteousness before God, while influenced by these factors, is primarily rooted in their individual and corporate responses of faith or trust in God. It ends by pressing the logic of the argument to the point that faith is more important than the outward ritual.

**The Promise Realized Through Faith**

**v 13** *For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.* Paul now makes the same argument in regard to the law. The promise is to Abraham and his ‘seed.’ He interprets God’s promise in Genesis (12:3; 18:18; 22:18), that all the families or nations of the earth would be blessed by Abraham and his seed, as inheriting the world. In Hebrews (11:6) it is no earthly kingdom, but a better country; a heavenly one. When God made this promise to Abraham and his seed there was no mention of the law. Instead, the promise was connected only with ‘the righteousness that comes by faith.’

**v 14** *For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.* If those who are Jews and live by the law are heirs of the promise, ‘faith means nothing.’ or literally, faith has been emptied. It would no longer be the necessary condition for receiving the inheritance. The promise would be ‘worthless,’ because the promise that Abraham’s descendants would inherit the land was made in response to Abraham’s faith (Gen 15:1-21), this promise would be worthless if it depended on his observance of the law (which had not yet been given).

**v 15** *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* As Paul has argued in chapters 1-3, even the Jews are in fact transgressors of the law, so that the law can only bring them wrath. The argument here is not historical, but legal. Law, transgression, and wrath are not the soil of promise or inheritance. If the promise came by virtue of his obedience, then the promise was given in exchange for a deed, and was no promise at all. For where there is law, wrath, and transgression, there is no faith, promise, or inheritance – these are mutually exclusive. Since God will not place us under His wrath, but will give us the inheritance, He has not bound it to the law, but made faith the means of fulfillment. Now the promise rests on God’s grace. Now it is sure.

**v 16** *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,* The strength of the promise to Abraham rests on grace, that is, by faith. The law cannot secure the promise because it sets limits to the promise. The children of Abraham are not just biological. Because gentile as well as Jewish believers may be said to be ‘of the faith of Abraham’, Paul can say that ‘he is the father of us all.’ In the next verse he will quote Genesis 17:5. In its original context it is talking of biological descendants, but Paul suggests the presence of a far-reaching thought. Among the rabbis, there was support for this idea, that Abraham can be called the father of proselytes and even the father of all men.

**Year 2 Week 1 – Romans 4 The Promise Realized Through Faith**

We pick up at verse 16 in the midst of an argument that has played throughout the history of Christianity. These words of Paul were at the heart of Augustine’s work which was picked up by Luther. It was in Augustine’s time that Pelagius objected to Augustine’s prayer, “Grant what Thou commandest, and command what Thou dost desire.” Pelagius reacted by saying that whatever God commands implies the ability of the one who receives the command to obey it. Man should not have to ask for grace in order to be obedient. This controversy has continued throughout the history of the Christian church. The Roman Catholic Church condemned Pelagius and Pelagianism. Later the church would condemn Semi-Pelagianism, a position which made room for a cooperation between grace and free will in the salvation of the individual. In the Council of Trent, Rome condemned Augustianism in its attack on Luther and the other reformers.

After Luther’s death, the Lutherans under Melancthon moved away from Luther’s position. There have been several controversies through Lutheran history over our cooperation in salvation. The Lutheran confessions (The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, part XI. Election,) state, (#5) *“The eternal election of God, however, vel praedestinatio (or predestination), that is, God's ordination to salvation, does not extend at once over the godly and the wicked, but only over the children of God, who were elected and ordained to eternal life before the foundation of the world was laid, as Paul says, [Eph. 1:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.4" \t "_blank). [5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%201.5" \t "_blank): He hath chosen us in Him, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.”* Later it also states, (#8) *“The eternal election of God, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this [divine predestination] our salvation is so founded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, [Matt. 16:18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2016.18" \t "_blank), as is written in [John 10:28](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010.28" \t "_blank): Neither shall any man pluck My sheep out of My hand. And again, [Acts 13:48](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.48" \t "_blank): And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.”* This spells out what has become known as the Lutheran position of ‘single predestination,’ as distinct from the Calvinist position known as, ‘double predestination.’

Within Calvinism, Jacobus Arminius promoted human free will resisting some of the Calvinist tenets (unconditional election, the nature of the limitation of the atonement, and irresistible grace). In reaction to Arminius, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) defined the five points of Calvinism (TULIP).

At the root of all of these controversies is the question of whether we as human beings can take any credit, even the most insignificant, for our own salvation. The words of the hymn make the Augustinian declaration, *“Nothing of my own I bring, but wholly lean on Jesus name.” –* So with that tangent, we now return to our study of Romans 4.

**v 17***as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.* In its original context (Gen 17:4-6) these words referred to Abraham having a multitude of physical descendants. *“I will make you fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.”* Paul sees the fulfillment of this promise, not simply in the multitude of physical descendants, but also, and more significantly, in the multitude of both Jews and Gentiles who walk in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith and thus have their own faith credited to them as righteousness. The point is that Abraham is our father ‘in the sight of God.’ He continues, “Who gives life to the dead,” reminding us that to give life is a distinctly divine prerogative. This leads to the following verses where age or deadness of womb are not any obstacle to such a God. With the allusion to ‘father’ we also think about what it means to be a child. What choice did we have or what did we contribute to our own conception or birth? The last few words imply *creatio ex nihilo*.

**v 18** *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”* This describes the nature of Abraham’s faith in God. The essential point is that despite all those things that militated against the possibility of Abraham becoming a father of many nations – things that will be spelled out next – he believed the promise of God, just as it had been said to him. “So shall your children be,” is an exact quote from Gen 15:5, which in this context reflect the magnitude of the promise and how impossible Abraham considered its fulfillment to be (Gen 15:2-6).

**v 19** *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.* Paul proceeds to explain what it meant for Abraham to believe against all hope. It was not a denial of the realities of his and Sarah’s situation. While we may wonder at this given some of Abraham’s actions, especially with Hagar, we remember that it was only later that God made it clear the Sarah would be the mother of these children of the promise.

**v 20** *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,* The stubborn realities did not cause his faith to waver, but God came to him, and in repeatedly conveying the promise strengthened Abraham’s faith. This suggests that it was not something that Abraham could do on his own, but even his faith is a gift from God and the Holy Spirit. Being strengthened in his faith, *“he gave glory to God,”* implying that it is faith in God itself that glorifies God as an expression of a belief in God’s goodness, truthfulness, reliability, and His promises. Abraham gave glory to God by steadfastly acknowledging the trustworthiness of His promise to him.

**v 21** *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.* So Abraham’s faith gained strength from it victory over the hindrance created by the conflict between God’s promise and the physical evidence. Abraham became fully convinced that God had the power to perform what He promised.

**v 22** *That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”* Paul concludes this section by restating Gen 15:6, *“This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.”* This unwavering faith makes him acceptable to God. Having argued the case regarding Abraham and his life, Paul now turns to the implications of this for his readers.

**v 23** *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,* They were written at first for the sake of Abraham, or at least to his honor, but also for us. This is an affirmation that scripture not only had relevance for Abraham but is in fact relevant for all believers.

**Year 2 Week 2 – Romans 4 The Promise Realized Through Faith**

Verse 23 changes tense from past to present. In 23-25 there are three themes that will be expounded upon in 5:1-11 (righteousness, Christ’s death for sins and Christ’s resurrection for righteousness). The understanding of what once occurred gives the past its meaning for the present. *“Paul did not plunder the OT for every conceivable prediction of the event of Jesus Christ – though indeed the riddle of the death of its Messiah had forced the primitive community before him back into the OT for its explanation.*[[15]](#footnote-15)” For Paul, the new gathered the old into itself, and recreated it so that the ‘once’ (Abraham) became the ‘now’ (us).

**v 24** *but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,* This verse makes the direct connection to the righteousness of Abraham who believed the words of God (Father), who raised Jesus from the dead. For Abraham it was belief in the one who would ask for the sacrifice of Isaac, believing that God ‘could even raise the dead.’ (Heb 11:17-19)

**v 25** *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* Many commentators connect these words to Isaiah 53:12. It is an appeal to Jews who knew this text, and it expressed what he wanted to say. It is significant both parts are in the passive, (was delivered; was raised) a point that we will return to in 8:32. The fact that Jesus our Lord was handed over for our sins, the ultimate expression of God’s love for humanity, stands at the heart of Paul’s gospel. His death atones for our sins. To say that His resurrection justifies means it authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured, that His work of redemption has been completed. Verse 8:34 connects this to the present intercessory work of Jesus. For all the different themes the main point is that this was all done, ‘for us’!

**Chapter 5 Peace with God, Through Faith**

**v 1** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Having set God’s way of justification, and established it on a scriptural basis, Paul now lists the blessings that accrue to those whose faith has been counted to them for righteousness. The first of these is peace with God. We have existed in a state of rebellion, committing treason and fleeing from the presence of God. It was the purpose of God to ‘reconcile to Himself all things’ through Christ, primarily those who were once ‘estranged and hostile’ to Him at heart (Col 1:20-22). Now we rejoice in the hope of sharing His glory. This peace is both objective and subjective. It is objective in that it is a peace established through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, when He made peace by the blood of His cross. It is subjective in that we can then have a sense of being at peace with God as the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God. This peace is fundamentally different from the *Pax Romana* won and maintained by Romans emperors by the exercise of brutal force.

**v 2** *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God* A look at various sources and Paul’s argument throughout this book, it all points to something that has happened that is out of our hands. The faith of those whom God justifies is faith like that of Abraham; faith that takes God at His word, believing the gospel of God concerning His Son, and accepting His promise of salvation. This is done without claiming any personal merit. Access implies a privilege of approaching or being introduced into the presence of someone in a high station, especially a royal or divine person. Here Christ is viewed as ushering believers into their new state of grace and acceptance before God. (Eph 3:12) This is reconciliation and restoration to the purpose for which God created us in the first place, that we may *‘share’* (RSV) in the glory of God. Here it is expressed as *‘hope’* for what we might not recognize in the present but which is implied in all of God’s promises (I will make your name great). It is the status humanity enjoyed, being created in the image and glory of God, that was marred by sin. Believers are in the process of being restored as we are ‘*being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory*’ (2Cor 3:18). (See also: Col 1:27, 3:4; 1Thess 2:12, 14; Matt 13:43)

**v 3***Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* There is a connection between the sufferings experienced by believers in the present time and their participation in the glory yet to be revealed. Paul asserts that his present ‘light and momentary’ sufferings (in fact they were heavy and ongoing) are achieving (producing / working) for him an eternal weight of glory. This is not historical accident, (simply human response to God’s activity) but the mark of the crucified reflected in the believer’s existence by inner necessity.

**v 4***and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,*

**v 5***and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Life in Christ is discipleship with the Crucified. The risen One is removed from the sphere of suffering, but for the moment weakness is the only reality of fellowship with Him, since He still makes His way in the world through those shaped to His sufferings. Christian existence is characterized by a dynamic movement toward a goal, and is of necessity ***by faith*** precisely because weakness and suffering are capable of misinterpretation. The truth in hidden in the present reality. Luther spent time in these verses contrasting the false (Theology of Glory) from the true (Theology of the Cross). ***By faith*** then means that the essential mark of Christian existence is hiddenness, since its progression from suffering to endurance to character to hope of sharing the glory of God cannot be measured. The event which establishes this existence is the cross. All boasting outside of boasting in Christ is excluded, since nothing except weakness, cross, and death achieves visibility. To be justified means nothing if not the epiphany of the risen Christ in the shape of His suffering. This is Paul’s boast! The conclusion in v5 yields the underlying reason for this boast, *‘hope does not disappoints us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.’*

**v 6***For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* We return to a description of God’s love. While we were still weak, at the right time – not in the time that we make for ourselves, but in God’s own good time – Christ died for the ungodly. It is for those who do not work, but trust in the One who justifies. (Gal 4:4-6) The additional description of this time is defined as, ‘when we were still powerless (weak). It language designates the wickedness of the unredeemed world against which God’s wrath is revealed. (1:18; 4:5) We are a part of that world, alienated from God.

**Year 2 Week 3 – Romans 5 Peace with God, Through Faith (cont)**

**v 6 (cont)** The factthat ‘Christ died for the ungodly,’ distinguishes the love of God for humanity more than anything else. He died for those who actually violate God’s expectations of humanity, those whom Paul will shortly describe as God’s enemies. Paul contemplates that people have sacrificed their own life for a friend, but to do so for the sake of an enemy is unknown. In a Jewish context it was well known that one might die out of loyalty to the law (2Macc 7:9, 8:21) or on behalf of the nation (John 18:14), but to die for the ungodly, those whose wickedness attracts the wrath of God was unthinkable (Sirach 12:4-7; ‘do not help the sinner’).

**v 7***For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—* Paul highlights the extraordinary nature of God’s love by way of comparison. Some regard ‘righteous’ and ‘good’ as a parallelism, but others suggest that ‘righteous’ refers to a person, while ‘the good’ references God or Christ for whom martyrs were prepared to die.

**v 8***but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the apex of the argument. How do we comprehend this reality outside of acknowledging the depth of God’s love for us? There is no other reason that makes sense of the cross. (Gal 2:20; 1John 4:10) Paul has already said that God, by presenting His Son ‘as a sacrifice of atonement’, demonstrated His justice while justifying sinners (3:35-26). Now he stresses that this action was also a demonstration of God’s love for sinners. This demonstration of God’s love was made while the objects of that love were still at enmity with Him. Note the repetitive statement of Christ’s death for sinners. The argument in 6-8 goes from the lesser to the greater.

**v 9***Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*  Because Christ died for us sinners, there are implications for what follows. Justification through Christ’s blood implies salvation from God’s wrath. The ultimate threat that faces sinners, since Adam, is the wrath of God. The wrath of God refers to the consuming power of the world creator and judge that has already become evident in hidden form in the history of the world.

**v 10***For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* Prior to the conversion of believers, they were ‘God’s enemies’. There are many other places that Paul speaks of unbelievers as God’s enemies (1:30, 8:7, 11:28, Phil 3:18, Colossians 1:21). There are questions about whether the enmity is only on our side. God’s opposition to all that is evil includes enmity against sinners. The wonder of the gospel is that God’s rescuing love has found a way of deliverance and reconciliation. The enmity certainly begins on our side with sin, which is treason against God. If we accept mutual enmity as the result of God’s reaction to sin, the work of reconciliation comes from God’s side. It is God’s initiative on our behalf even though we are the ones suffering from the consequences of alienation from God. Reconciliation is not a major theme for Paul, getting just three mentions (5:10-11, 11:15, 1 Cor 5:18-19). Paul uses a juxtaposition of justification and reconciliation here that raises the question of the distinction between the two concepts. While ‘just’ and ‘right’ are held in the closest relationship, twin words for the same idea. Reconciliation is seen as distinct, but Paul’s understanding of God as the justifier of sinners cannot be separated from his understanding of God as reconciler. God is not a detached judge dispensing judgment, but the lover of sinners desiring reconciliation with them. The final phrase, “saved by His life” may imply that our full salvation comes about by sharing in His risen life, or ‘in His life’. *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal 2:20). This brings to the forefront the intercessory role of the risen Christ referred to in other NT writings (8:34, Heb 7:25, 1 John 2: 1-2).

**v 11***More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* This section concludes with our ‘boast’ or ‘rejoicing’ because we have received reconciliation. Reconciliation emphasizes the relational aspect, restoring the original status of the garden where Adam and Eve walked with God (Gen 3:18). It is always God who is the reconciler, and we the recipients. It is the King proclaiming an amnesty for rebellious subjects, who are urged to accept His gracious pardon, while it is extended to them. God’s abhorrence of sin does not make Him the enemy of sinners or seek their ill; His desire is for all ‘*to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*’ (1 Tim 2:4).

**v 12***Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—* ‘Therefore’ functions as a transition, then adding ‘just as’ to introduce the Adam – Christ analogy. Paul says sin entered the world in Adam’s disobedience (Gen 3). It was through ‘one man’ (adam – is Hebrew for man) that ‘sin entered the world.’ He is saying more than that Adam’s one sinful act was sin entering the world, implying that this one sinful act released into the world a new baleful (malevolent) power, called sin. This is implied frequently in Paul’s writings, most often in Romans, especially in reference to people being slaves to sin. (6:6-7, 17-18, 20; Gal 3:22). It also implies sin seizing the opportunity to deceive and entrap people (7:8-9, 11), as a force operating with people and rendering their wills powerless to resist (7:17, 20, 23, 25), and a force that could only be overcome by the action of God in Christ (8:2-3). Consider how this picks up from Genesis 4:7, where *‘sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you…*’. The fact that sin entered the world through this one man is not the end of the matter. Through sin, death has also entered the world, the divine punishment that God warned of in Gen 2:17, follows ushering the ‘reign of death.’ It is not simply the consequence of sin, but the power of death unleashed into the world as a result of sin, a power that afflicts all people. There is much attention given to the words translated ‘because.’ Some translate it as ‘in whom’ referring to Adam. This highlights the idea that people are subject to death not because of their own sin, but because of Adam’s. Being corrupted by sin, all those whom he fathered were born under sin. Others construe it to mean either that the result of Adam’s sin was that death passed to all, or to indicate the realm in which the effect of Adam’s sin occurs – that is, in the world. It is clear that no matter how one reads this, there is a primary and secondary reason for our subjection to death. The primary cause is Adam’s disobedience and the secondary cause is the sin of disobedience of all subsequent human beings, who likewise bring death upon themselves.

**Year 2 Week 4 – Romans 5 Peace with God, Through Faith (cont)**

**v 13***sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.*  Paul anticipates a possible objection to his words. He references the Mosaic Law, noting that sin and death entered creation prior to the giving of the law in Exodus. How can one be guilty of sin when there is no law to define it? There was law from the very beginning. Adam and Eve had that one law, don’t eat from the one tree. Murder happens soon after, and there is a punishment, spelled out later in the institution of the death penalty (Gen 9:6). Jewish tradition regarded the seven commandments to Noah (Gen 9:1-7) as binding on all gentiles. The oldest form of that tradition recognized 6 of these as creation ordinance. The only new commandment was the prohibition on eating meat with the blood in it. The presence of sin in the world is evident from the time of Adam, because the penalty for sin, death, continued to affect humanity. Paul states that it is not ‘charged to anyone’s account’ when there is no law. This implies that the law’s role is to make people accountable for sin (also implied in 4:15: *‘because the law brings wrath’*). Are people not liable for sin prior to the law? The implication is that another law preceded the Mosaic law.

**v 14***Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.*  Sin exercised dominion because it was self-evident that ‘sin was in the world’ even before the law that defined sin explicitly was given (Mosaic Law). The penalty for sin continued to be applied, even when they did not break a law like Adam did. Does this suggest a *Natural Law,* that is evident even when it was explicitly codified? At least some of it is spelled out at the end of the Noah account. For Paul, it was in disobedience to the creation ordinances that the death-deserving ungodliness of the pagan world consisted (1:18-32). So this statement seems relative, especially since Paul’s use of ‘law’ in 5:12-21 seems to refer consistently to the Mosaic law, which Paul notes, ‘*was added so that the trespass might increase’* (5:20). Rudolph Bultmann asked what he regarded as two unanswerable questions: (i) What sort of sin was it if it did not originate as a contradiction of the law?, (ii) How can it have brought death after it if it was not ‘counted’?

The effort to avoid this contradiction follows a logical argument. The premise is, ‘Death requires sin (5:12, 6:23), and sin prerequires law (5:13, 4:15, 7:8; 1Cor 15:56).’ A minor premise is, ‘death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses. The conclusion is, ‘The people living between Adam and Moses were under law just as surely as the Jews are now.’ This leads to the assumption that the Universal Law that has made its entrance in 2:14 (*the gentiles are a law to themselves, showing the requirements of the law written on their hearts*). The verse concludes by describing Adam as a ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ of one to come. Usually ‘type’ would suggest a positive example of behavior (Phil 3:17, 1Thess 1:7, 2Thess 3:9, 2Tim 4:12, Tit 2:7). In one other place, 1Cor 10:6, having spoken of Israel’s sins and God’s punishment, Paul says, “These things occurred as examples ‘types’ to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” Paul indicates that Adam is a type of the coming one, Christ. In one respect alone is Adam the type of the coming one: The action of Adam affected all people in him just as the action of Christ affects all those in Him. So there will be no misunderstanding, Paul spends the next three verses highlighting the differences before completing his comparison of the effects of the acts of Adam and Christ.

**v 15** *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.* Contrasting the effects of Adam’s action and Christ’s action, it is immediately noteworthy that Paul describes the work of Christ as a gift, something freely and graciously given, while describing what Adam did as a trespass. The ‘trespass’ is Adam’s disobedience to the divine command, resulting in death for many. ‘The many’ of Adam is the great mass of humanity. What then is ‘the many’ of Christ? Calvin said ‘the many’ of Christ cannot denote a minority. It follows from these words, he said, “That the grace of Christ belongs to the greater number than the condemnation contracted by the first man.” Does that agree with Jesus’ words of the narrow gate (Matt 7:13-14, Luke 13:24)? Calvin’s reasoning appeared to be, ‘if Adam’s fall had the effect of producing the ruin of many, the grace of God is much more efficacious in benefitting many, since admittedly Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to ruin.’ Paul uses ‘many’ to refer to both Adam’s trespass and God’s grace. When he says, ‘much more surely’ or ‘how much more,’ Paul is emphasizing that God’s grace is infinitely greater for good than is Adam’s sin for evil. The grace that abounds to many is on those who receive the abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness (v 17), believers. Does that more saved than condemned, or that the work of salvation is much more substantive? It is easier to kill than to bring to life. It is easier to fall than to get up. We do not limit the saved to the literal ‘144,000’ like Jehovah’s witnesses. Isaiah 9:6-7 says, *‘of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end.*’ This is an ever-expanding kingdom, that speaks of the ‘many’ of God, much as the promise to Abraham speaks of many (Gen 15:5).

**v 16** *And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.* In highlighting the contrast it is understandable that one single misdeed should be answered by judgment. That the accumulated sins and guilt of all ages should be answered by one sacrifice is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension. The ‘gift’ was God’s gift in providing His Son as the atoning sacrifice for sins and this gift made justification possible.

**v 17** *If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.* Paul continues to emphasize the contrast between Adam and Christ. The trespass of Adam attracted God’s judgment that led to punishment that took the form of death. It was not only Adam who was subject to death, but death ‘reigned’ through him over all people. If this was the malignant result of the trespass of one man, Paul says, *“how much more”* will Christ’s action provide for us. Adam’s action meant that people were subject to death, but Christ’s action means that people can *‘reign in life’* because they receive *‘the abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness’*. Paul makes a similar statement in 1 Cor 15:21-22, *“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”*

**Year 2 Week 5 – Romans 5 Peace with God, Through Faith (cont)**

**v 18** *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* This verse, on first reading would appear to imply that just as Adam’s trespass affected all people without exception, so also Christ’s righteous act likewise affects all people without exception, and in fact there are those who argue that this is what Paul intended. Why is that a misreading? He has already said that it is ‘*those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness’ who will ‘reign in life’* (17). The ‘all men’ (people) of the latter part of the phrase is best understood to mean all who receive the gift of grace, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. The ‘one act of righteousness’ is Christ’s obedience to His Father in offering Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sins: the act that made it possible for God to justify freely those who believe in His Son. Paul asserts that this ‘one righteous act’ (*dikaiōma)* resulted in ‘justification and life’. Some translate the second use of *dikaiōsis*, as ‘acquittal’. In essence Paul is restating verse 17 in different words.

**v 19** *For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.* We have another repeat of the same argument from v18, now using ‘disobedience’ and ‘obedience’ in place of ‘trespass’ and ‘righteousness’. Adam disobeyed God by ignoring the command given him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17, 3:1-6, 11). Christ obeyed God by submitting to death on the cross to effect salvation (Phil 2:8: *‘He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!*). The obedience of Christ accomplished more than Abraham’s obedience could ever do. By His passion and triumph He has won the right and power to beat back the hostile cosmic forces - to ‘retrieve the cosmic situation’, as C. K. Barrett puts it[[16]](#footnote-16) and ensured for His people a participation in His victory.

**v 20** *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,* The 2nd use of the law is to show us our sin, or act as a mirror. The increase in trespass and sin makes it much more evident and obvious the extent, gravity and weight of our sin. God’s mercy is more comprehensive than sin. (…more comprehensive [more powerful, richer, and stronger] than sin. If any one thinks that he obtains the remission of sins because he loves, he dishonors Christ and will discover in God's judgment that this confidence in his own righteousness is wicked and vain. Therefore it is necessary that faith [alone] reconciles {Ap V29}). “If sin *abounded*, God’s grace has *superabounded!* Harrison has argued that Paul’s reference to the superabounding beneficence of Christ would have ‘registered’ with his Roman audience, who recalled the Augustan period and the imperial propaganda that extolled the remarkable beneficence of Caesar Augustus. For them, he says, Paul’s words about the superabounding grace of Christ would be understood as an implicit claim that the beneficence of Christ outshone that of Caesar.[[17]](#footnote-17)”

**v 21** *so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* The contrast between the effects of sin increasing and grace superabounding could not be greater: Sin ‘reigned in death’, grace reigned ‘through righteousness to bring eternal life’. The agencies through which grace reigned are twofold: ‘through righteousness’ on the one hand, and ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’ on the other. ‘Through Jesus Christ our Lord’ is a reference to the fact that the gift of eternal life comes to believers only through Jesus Christ, through His atoning sacrifice that effected salvation, an action so different from the death-delivering action of Adam.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Romans 6 Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

In Chapters 6-7 Paul discusses the three elements of sin (6:1), grace (6:15), and law (7:7). Each is introduced with the formulaic question, “What then?” This is a new phase in his argument, but it carries forward the issues raised in chapters 4-5. We should see his argument as one discussion that flows logically building one point on to the next. 6:1-14 is crucial to understanding Paul’s theology of baptism. Here, more than anywhere else in the NT is the meaning of baptism to be found, however the main point is not baptism. It is to demonstrate that this gospel does not lead to anarchy. The church has faced from its beginning people who insist that the logical corollary of justification by grace is that we can just go on sinning all we like.

**v 1** *What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?* The question of unrestrained sin is not simply hypothetical. In every generation people claiming to be justified by faith have behaved in such a way as to lend credence to this charge. There are numerous examples through history, but a more recent one was the Russian monk Gregory Rasputin. He was known as the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. He taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He held that, as those who sin most require the most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God’s forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner. There are many who tend to act this way, but most not as blatantly as Rasputin. Paul’s own converts gave him much concern on this same issue. In Corinthians 5:1-13 Paul calls for the excommunication of a man living in an incestuous relationship, with the church members apparently accepting of this situation. They seemed to think this was a fine expression of Christian liberty. Witnessing such things, it is no wonder that other Christians have maintained that the only way to teach sound morality was by requiring the observance of the law above and beyond the requirement of faith in Christ. Paul’s own experience taught that the keeping of the law did not bring the assurance of salvation. Legalism could not be the remedy for antinomianism or libertinism. His was proposing a more excellent way. When people yielded their lives to the risen Christ and the power of His Spirit, their inward being was radically transformed: a new creation took place. This new birth conveys a new identity and new nature which delights in the fruit of the Spirit, those graces found in Christ.

**Year 2 Week 6 – Romans 6 Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

**v 2** *By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?*  For Paul, it was bad enough to have theological opponents criticize the gospel as providing a license to sin; it was worse when his converts played into their hands by acting exactly the same. The basic assumption is that believers have ‘died to sin’ and therefore any suggestion that they should continue to ‘live in sin’ [lit. ‘remain’] is unthinkable. In the following verses Paul uses baptism as a shorthand means of describing the whole conversion experience. In baptism the former existence of a pagan comes to and end and a new life as a Christian begins.

**v 3**  *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* The question begins with ‘don’t you know’ [lit. ‘are you ignorant’], a facetious expression that he expects his audience to know this already [also 7:1]. What is baptism all about? It is baptism ‘into Christ Jesus.’ It is part of the full conversion-initiation experience that involves repentance and faith in Christ expressed in submission to baptism on the part of the convert, when God for His part grants forgiveness and the gift of His Spirit. It is about death and rebirth. I have come to see the Moses infancy narrative as providing a powerful analogy of baptism. Moses was born under judgment, a sentence of death decreed upon all male babies of the Israelites. They were to be ‘cast into the Nile’ [Ex 1:22]. In the baptismal liturgy we are described as ‘born, children of a fallen humanity’, or we might say, ‘as children of adam.’ The death sentence is carried out. The sinner is cast into the water to be drowned and killed, the proper execution of sentence. The wonder is that this execution is not the end of the story.

**v 4** *Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* The purpose of our dying with or in Christ, is so that we might share in the rest of His story. Moses’ life did not end in the Nile. He was drawn out of the water, out of death, into a new life. We talk about adoption, and a new identity; Moses, drawn out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter, was no longer an Israelites. She claimed him as her own child, which made him a member of the household of the king, and brought him into a whole new experience of life unlike anything that he could experience as a child of slaves. Christ died and was raised by the glory of the Father, so when believers are baptized, they ‘die’ to their old life and begin a new life as Christians (turning over a new leaf). Our death to sin at baptism makes it possible for us to live a new life. It is implied in Paul’s words that our death and burial with Christ in baptism must be as real as the newness of life that it made possible. We benefit from Christ’s vicarious substitutionary death on the cross by coming under His sphere of influence of lordship. He has paid the price for us so that we now belong to Him.

**v 5**  *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* The believers’ union with Christ in His death is tied to their union with Him in His resurrection. ‘For’ indicates that these statements constitute the basis upon which Paul can say that, ‘we too might live a new life.’ A literal reading of ‘united with Him’ might read, ‘if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death.’ The existence of the Christian is intertwined with that of the Messiah, like two young trunks that grow around one another. (My wife’s ficus tree.) Paul lays it out as because/therefore. ‘If we have been,’ then ‘we will certainly also be.’ It can be read as either a logical future, sharing in the resurrection life now, or as an eschatological future, sharing in the resurrection life on the last day. In this context Paul is exhorting his readers to offer themselves to God as instruments of righteousness in the daily behavior and actions that demonstrate a present resurrection life.

**v 6** *We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.* The old self can be understood through numerous images Paul uses. It is the old self that faces judgment, and must be killed. It is only by linking it with Christ’s crucifixion this can happen. The old self might be the old adam, or the old dirty clothes that must be removed. In Ephesians 4:22 we are urged to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. In Colossians 3:9 they are exhorted, *‘do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old self with its practices.’* The ‘old self’ is the former way of life with which a Christian must be done. The ‘old self’ is not a part of, but the whole of what we were prior to conversion, when we were in Adam. The purpose of the ‘old self’ being crucified is that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

**v 7**  *For whoever has died is freed from sin.* Your old master cannot do anything to you once you have died. You are freed from their control. They can get nothing from you. ‘Freed’ or ‘set free’ is used 27 times in Paul’s letters. It is almost always correct to render it in those occasions as ‘justify’ or ‘declare righteous.’ We are set free from sin. Once we die we cannot sin any more.

**v 8**  *But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* Paul argues, that just as Christ died to sin and now lives to God, so we who have died to sin with Him must likewise live to God. Having argued that we have died with Christ, he now makes this the premise for the belief that ‘we will also live with Him.’ Both of these things occur because believers are united with Christ. Again, the whole thrust of this section is not simply to set as the future goal in which we hope for in the last day, but to call us to this new way of life here and now. In this verse Paul may be seen shifting the focus from the present, to that future hope. *We believe that we will also live with Him.* We have to recognize that the new Christian life is both present and future.

**v 9**  *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* It is important to distinguish Christ’s death and resurrection for others that are recorded in the Bible. Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5;21-24, 35-43), the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17), Lazarus (John 1:1-44), and Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) are all resurrected, but each of these would subsequently die again. Jesus’ resurrection was of a different order altogether – being raised from the dead, ‘he cannot die again,’ and therefore it may be said that death no longer rules over Him.

**v 10** *The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.* Paul makes a distinction by saying *‘we died to sin’* (6:2) while Christ *‘died to sin, once for all.’* We die to sin through our union with Christ. Christ died to sin when He was crucified. When Paul speaks of Christ’s death, he speaks of it as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

**Year 2 Week 7 – Romans 6 Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

**v 10** To assert that Christ ‘died to sin once for all’ should be understood to mean that He died to deal with the problem of human sin, and He did so ‘once for all,’ that is once and for all in the sense of once and never again. His one death was sufficient to deal fully and for all time with the problem if human sin.

**v 11** *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* This is not a matter of pretending, but that believers should consider themselves to be what God has in fact made them. It is the Holy Spirit that comes to make effective in the believer what Christ has done for them. We are released from the tyranny of sin as a result of what Christ has done. As Christ now lives in a restored relationship with God following His death on the cross, so we are to count ourselves as ‘alive’ (living) to God in Christ. In Galatians 5:25 Paul says, *‘Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.’* (also: Eph 2:4-5) The reckoning, with the help of the Holy Spirit, opens the eyes of the mind and heart to recognize what is true. This comes out of Paul’s understanding of baptism, and is a reasonable so long as ‘baptism’ is understood as the whole conversion/initiation experience which includes repentance and faith focused in the submission to baptism on the part of the person and the response of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit by God.

**v 12** *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* Our death to sin does not mean that we are immune to temptation or incapable of falling into sin. It means that sin’s tyranny has been broken so that we are free to choose not to do so (posse non peccare). Our ‘mortal body’ is the present body, which is the place in which the evil desires that we must refuse to obey, are realized, and which is still subject to death.

**v 13** *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness through thoughts, desires and actions. To do so would make your body an instrument, or tool or even a weapon used to accomplish evil. Yielding to sin is both active and passive. There is a positive alternative. Offer yourself to God and yield your body as an instrument or tool of righteousness. To offer is to place yourself at someone’s disposal or service. The word translated as ‘instrument’ could also be ‘weapon’ and some commentators believe Paul is making a military reference here.

**v 14** *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.* You do not need to be dominated by sin. It is no longer your master, because you are now under grace. Everything in this chapter is leading here. You have a new life (v4). You are no longer a slave to sin (6). The second part of the statement (you are not under law), leads into the following verses (15-23). By saying that they *‘are not under the law, but under grace’*, Paul foreshadows his discussion of new life in the Spirit that makes possible what the law could not achieve because of the weakness of human flesh. To be ‘under law’ means to live under the regime of the Mosaic Law, under the old covenant where the law was something written on tables of stone. To be ‘under grace’ is to live under the new covenant, where the law is written on the human heart (2 Cor 3:3). Living under grace rather than the law does not mean that we are free to flout the moral imperatives of the law, for these are the moral standards required of humanity by God (You shall not kill/ murder). For those who walk by the Spirit, the ‘just requirement’ of the law is fulfilled (8:4), as Paul says, *‘the commandments, … are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.’* (13:9, Gal 5:14)

**v 15** *What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!* We come to the second ‘What then?’ This time the focus shifts from sin, to the matter of grace. He now addresses the true nature of Christian freedom and the choice that faces them: either to be slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. The concept of slavery is well known to the Roman believers, with an estimate 60% coming from the slave class. Paul emphasizes in this passage that life under grace is still a life of obedience. Paul is addressing those who were afraid his law-free gospel would undermine godliness. Paul uses the first person plural (‘we’), including himself among those for whom this is a live question. The opponents would claim that to say believers are not under the law removes the law as the primary deterrent to sin and become an encouragement to lawlessness. Paul’s response is unequivocal, ‘*By no means!’*

**v 16** *Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?* Addressing his opponents directly, Paul says, *‘Do you not know?’* Using the imagery of slavery and states the obvious fact that to offer yourself as a slave to someone means that you become a slave of that person. How can one be unaware of this obvious fact known to all in that culture? Being a slave involved both status (someone wholly owned by another) and control (subservience to another). Paul’s audience would include those who had offered themselves as slaves out of necessity. It would also include freedmen, those who had once been slaves but had been granted or purchased their freedom. They would all know what it is to be a slave and those who were freed might have found the idea of believers being slaves as unpalatable. The general principle applied, Paul spells out the options. Either you are a slave to sin which leads to death or a slave of obedience (to God), which leads to righteousness. This echoes Jesus’ words in John 8:34. While Paul is concerned with obedience to the gospel that leads to eternal life, the immediate concern is an actual ethical righteousness in the here and now.

**v 17** *But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted,* There is an expression of joy in the new state of affairs for the readers. They were once ‘slaves to sin,’ but that has all changed. Now they obey from the heart the pattern of teaching that has claimed their allegiance. The emphasis is on this obedience not being simply a matter of outward appearance, but a true change in the inward being. The use of ‘from the heart’ is likely a reference to Jeremiah 31:33 and the new covenant proclaimed by the prophet. The description of the gospel as ‘a pattern of teaching’ (*typos didachēs*) is unique to this passage. Paul often uses *typos* as a reference to a person who provides a pattern of conduct. Commentators have noted that the basic meaning is ‘imprint,’ which suggests Paul’s means that there is a strong link between the teaching and the imprint left on the believers heart (engraved with the law – Jer 31).

**Year 2 Week 8 – Romans 6 Slaves to Righteousness**

**v 18** *and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.* You are set free to become slaves. Is this an appealing message? To be a slave to righteousness speaks in an ethical sense, the opposite of a slave to sin, but also implies that they have already become slaves of God. Paul is arguing that this slavery to righteousness is genuine freedom. Following the theme of this section, the implication is that the gospel in no way gives a license to sin.

**v 19** *I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.* (lit. ‘because of the weakness of your flesh’) Paul argues that he has to use a human analogy of actual slavery in case they have failed to grasp his meaning. He gives an extended rational for his comparison of ‘Christian slavery to God’ with the human institution of slavery. He reminds them of their lives prior to conversion by virtually repeating v13. The exhortation here is more explicit than earlier. They are to avoid ‘impurity’ which in denotes sexual immorality in Romans, as it does elsewhere in Paul’s writings (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 4:19, 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:7). Paul’s reference to ‘greater and greater iniquity’ or ‘ever-increasing wickedness’ would refer to growing immorality. Instead of offering their bodies to this immorality, Paul calls them to be slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. Origen offers the following exposition of what this means: *‘Once your feet ran to the temples of demons; now they run to the church of God. Once they ran to spill blood; now they run to set it free. Once your hands were stretched out to steal what belonged to others; now they are stretched out for you to be generous with what is your own. Once your eyes looked at women or at something which was not yours with lust in them; but now they look at the poor, the weak and the helpless with pity in them. Your ears used to delight in hearing empty talk or in attacking good people; now they have turned to hearing the Word of God, to the exposition of the law and to the learning of the knowledge of wisdom. Your tongue, which was accustomed to bad language, cursing and swearing, has now turned to praising the Lord at all times; it produces healthy and honest speech, in order to give grace to the hearers and speak the truth to its neighbor’*.[[19]](#footnote-19) Sanctification, or being made holy, is the process of making one fit for the presence of God.

**v 20** *When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* Another reminder of their pre-Christian past, slavery to one master means freedom from control by a different master. Both ‘sin’ and ‘righteousness’ are personified as controlling powers. As slaves of sin, there was freedom, or no regard for the requirements of God.

**v 21** *So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death.* As slaves of sin, what benefits did you gain? It was only after they had converted to Christ that they experienced shame in the full realization of their sinfulness. The only fruit of sin is God’s judgment, death and wrath. It is God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die.

**v 22** *But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life.* Slavery to God bears much fruit that is worth everything. Those who are justified are now sanctified. They experience this here and now and also the final result in the future is eternal life. The benefit of holiness as slaves of God has communal as well as individual implications. Godly living is worked out primarily within the Christian community.

**v 23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This concludes Paul’s contrast between slavery to sin and slavery to God. Paul maintains that those who serve sin will receive the wages they deserve – death. Paul stresses frequently that sin leads to death in Romans (1:32; 5:12, 14, 17, 21; 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5) and elsewhere (1Cor 15:21, 56; 2Cor 7:10). Wages in ordinary usage provided sustenance for life, while this wage provides the opposite. Since wages are paid in increments as well as at the end of a task, the death Paul has in mind is a present reality that will extend into the future. Those who serve God do not receive the wages they deserve; rather, they receive the free ‘gift’ of eternal life. The gift of eternal life is both provided by God and received by believers in Christ Jesus our Lord. While the wages of sin is death for all who sin, the gift of eternal life is only for those who are ‘in Christ’, that is, those who are united with Him through faith and by the Spirit. In Paul’s letters, eternal life is always the final reward bestowed upon the righteous on the last day (Rom 2:7, 5:12, 6:22, 6:23, Gal 6:8; 1 Tim 1:16; 1Tim 6:12; Tit 1:2, 3:7). This is different than John, who has Jesus speak of eternal life as the present possession of believers (John 5:24). Paul does refer to the ‘new life’ believers experience in the here and now (Rom 6:4, 8:6, 8:10, 2Cor 4:10, 11; Col 3:4).

**Chapter 7 Freedom from the Law**

Paul turns his attention to the believer’s freedom from the law (1-6) and to a historic and experiential description of what life is like for those under the law (7-25). The nature of Paul’s understanding of freedom can be read as freedom from the condemnation of the law, or freedom from the law’s jurisdiction, since he distinguishes between the cultic (holiness code) and ethical demands. Paul’s primary purpose continues to be answering objections that his gospel involved a denigration of the law. He begins (1-6) strongly upholding the view that believers are free from the law, but contrary to expectations, this does not lead to an immoral life. The true Christian life bears fruit for God.

**v 1** *Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime?*  This should include the article “Or” connecting it to Ch 6 (omitted in NIV and NRSV). The expectation is that the readers should already know this. Since this is about freedom from the Mosaic law, those who know the law would be Jews, but also gentile God-fearers with some background in the synagogue. The point is that the law can only apply to a person while they are alive. It is noteworthy that in Acts 15:10, at the Council of Jerusalem, Peter describes the law as, “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.” He speaks there as a typical member of the Jewish community, thinking not only of the written law, but also its amplification in the traditions of the elders or the oral law.

**Year 2 Week 9 – Romans 7 Freedom from the Law**

**v 2** *Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.*  Here is Paul’s example (illustration) from marriage, but how does this inform us given the current cultural distortions? Marriage is a lifelong relationship. A wife is bound to her husband so long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to become the wife of another (see also 1 Corinthians 7:39).

**v 3** *Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.* The corollary of vs. 2 is that the bond of marriage means that if she leaves to become the wife of another man, she is branded an adulteress. Since death breaks the bond, she is free to marry another man after her previous husband has died. Commentaries make the point that Paul’s illustration does not correspond explicitly to Jewish or Roman law. Under Roman law, a woman is not irrevocably bound to her husband for life. Jewish law allows a husband to divorce his wife (Deut 24:1-4) but not for a woman to divorce her husband. In this sense, the woman is bound to her husband until he dies. That the death of the husband frees a woman from the law that previously bound her to him so that she is now free to marry another man is in accordance with both the Mosaic law and ‘apostolic Jewish-Christian law tradition.’

**v 4***In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.* Commentators find many issues with Paul’s application of this illustration because it is not the husband who dies. The easiest way to make sense of the matter is that death breaks the bond between husband and wife, so death – the believer’s death-with-Christ – breaks the bond that sin formerly had over the believer so that we are now able to enter into union with Christ. The former life did not produce the fruits of righteousness, but these fruits are produced in abundance now out of the new unity with Christ. Sin and death were the result of the association with the law; righteousness and life are the product of the new association; for (as Paul puts it) ‘the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (2Cor 3:6).

A number of matters in this statement call for clarification. First is the fact that the apostle does not actually say that ‘you … died’, but, when literally translated, ‘you were put to death’ to the law. This emphasizes that, unlike the death of the husband by natural causes in the illustration, the death of believers to the law is the result of divine initiative—they were ‘put to death’. This is best understood as a matter of God’s decision to regard Christ’s death for all as the death of all. Second, to ‘die to the law’ means living no longer under its authority, something made clear by Paul’s marriage illustration. Third, what does Paul mean by the unusual statement that believers died to the law ‘through the body of Christ’?Numerous references (1Cor 10:16, 11:24; Eph 2:13-15; Col 1:22, 2:14) imply that it is through the crucifixion that Christ freed His people from the law and the written indebtedness that stood against them. Allowing these other verses to guide our interpretation, we may conclude that Paul’s statement, ‘you also died to the law through the body of Christ’, to serve as shorthand for saying that believers have been freed from the law because Christ offered his body as a sacrifice for our sins and by so doing freed us from the law’s condemnation. More than this, however, Christ’s death and resurrection brought the period of the Mosaic law as the regulatory norm to an end for the people of God and inaugurated the new covenant under which the Mosaic law is replaced by the work of the Spirit in believers’ lives.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**v 5** *While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.* Verses 5 and 6 foreshadow 7:7-25 and 8:1-13. This verse depicts life prior to conversion, ‘in the flesh’ as our physical nature that is corruptible and rebellious. Paul is not blaming the law for our sin, but considers that it is far from being an effective deterrent, and is actually laid under tribute by sinful passions prior to conversion to bring us into greater bondage. Lives dominated by sinful passions draw God’s judgment – death.

**v 6** *But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.* Paul says ‘we’ including himself with his audience as one of those who have been released from the law. As 7:4 implied, they have been freed from the law’s condemnation and the obligation to submit to it as a regulatory norm. Like the woman whose husband has died, so Paul declares that believers have been released from the Mosaic law ‘so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code’ (lit. *‘so that we serve in newness of Spirit and not in oldness of letter’*). The contrast is between life under the old covenant and life under the new covenant (also 2 Cor 3:6). That believers are able to do this is in fulfillment of the prophecies of Ezekiel (36:26-27) and Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). Paul will explain this more fully in 8:1-13. The main emphasis here is on the new way of the Spirit.

**The Law and Sin**

**v 7**  *What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”* Paul wants to make sure that his readers do not think that the law itself is to blame for human moral failure. The law is holy, righteous, and good (12). It has become the unwilling ally of sin such that it is now part of the problem rather than part of the solution to the human predicament. Paul is not directly defending the law, but rejecting allegations that his message, which is the gospel, denigrates the law. Sin is the basic problem, not the law (whose only deficiency is ineffectiveness when countering the power of sin). Paul turns to a first person narrative to describe the interaction of sin and the law in the life of Israel. Remember that we have no evidence of Paul suffering from an uneasy conscience prior to his conversion. Up to that point he was confident in his persecution of the church as service to God, thus his ‘autobiography’ is usually seen as a ‘biography of Everyman.’ In his earliest life, he was carefree. A prison-house began to close upon him when he had to take on the obligation to keep the Ten Commandments.

**Year 2 Week 10 – Romans 7 The Law and Sin**

**v 7 (cont)** Prohibitions tend to awaken a desire to do the thing that is forbidden. The Ten Commandments consist primarily of prohibitions: “You shall not…” Paul was not greatly tempted to worship a graven image or to commit murder, adultery or theft. The trouble was with the tenth commandment, which dealt with an inner attitude rather than an overt action. This was his stumbling block. Covetousness is itself a sin; it is indeed a basic element in many forms of sin. As Paul puts it elsewhere, covetousness is idolatry (Col 3:5).

**v 8**  *But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.* Paul continues to speak of a ‘personified’ sin that is acting in opposition to us. When God issues His command, our sinful nature rebels and screams that it does not want to be told what to do. Paul can thus say that sin stirs up rebellion in sinners, and provoke us to act in opposition to the law. There has been great philosophical debate over this very issue apart from Paul. Socrates’ portrait of the ideally just and unjust state comes across the same dilemma. *“Just as a state enslaved to a tyrant cannot do what it really wishes, so neither can a soul under a similar tyranny do what it wishes as a whole. Goaded on against its will by the sting of desire, it will be filled with confusion and remorse. Like the corresponding state, it must always be poverty-stricken, unsatisfied, and haunted with fear. Nowhere else will there be so much lamentation, groaning, and anguish as in a country under a despotism, and in a soul maddened by the tyranny of passion and lust. It cannot be otherwise.”[[21]](#footnote-21)* When Paul says, “Apart from the law sin lies dead,” he means that with out the law, sin has nothing to feed on, nothing to stir up our passion and rebellion. The law stands against sin, but the law is passive such that sin uses it against us.

**v 9**  *I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived* Paul thought he was alive and keeping the law, but he was really dead in Sin (Eph 2:1-2). “*It may be said that Adam was ‘alive’ before the commandment was given and then, when the commandment came, the serpent took the opportunity it provided to provoke him to sin, which in turn brought about the entry of death (cf. 5:12). In similar fashion, Israel was ‘alive’ prior to the giving of the law, but once the law came in, sin ‘sprang to life’, provoking her to transgress the law, and drew down upon her the sanction of the law, death.”[[22]](#footnote-22)* Adam was not aware of any sinful inclination until his obedience was tested by the commandment “you shall not eat.” Paul understands The Fall narrative all the better in the light of general human experience (including his own).

**v 10** *and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.* (See Lev 18:5) Although the law did hold out a promise of life (Deut 27-28), as far as Paul was concerned, no one could access what the law promised. His whole argument in 1:18-3:20 leads to the following conclusions: *“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 (3:20).”*

**v 11** *For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* The commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. It is sin that is the great enemy, and that wields the law as a weapon against us in order to kill us. Paul’s assertion is that sin is to blame for Israel’s predicament, not the law, and no one should assume that in his preaching of the gospel he intends any criticism of the law.

**v 12** *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.* The law is not to blame because the law is good (Deut 4:8). Think about Exodus 23:19, “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” Milk is good and it has a purpose to give life to the newborn and young. The idea of turning it into a means of death is therefore repulsive to God. There is no good thing that God has created that we as human beings have not twisted and distorted and used to our own purpose for destruction and death. (Think about Judas, and the purpose of a kiss.) It is not the law, but the way sin and the devil use the law against us. Sin is our problem, and we go to hell because of unforgiven sin. There is a reason Satan is called the great deceiver (11), but Paul only mentions Satan once, while there is a constant emphasis on the problem of sin. This should help us recognize that our problem is not Satan but sin, which leads to judgment and hell.

The three descriptive words have been described as follows: ‘holy’ – its origin is God Himself whose nature is holy; ‘just’ – it cannot in any way be said to promote anything that is wrong; ‘good’ – its provision are universally positive and desirable. The point is to rule out any false conclusion that people might draw from his assertions that the law, having become the unwitting ally of sin, is part of the human dilemma, not its solution.

**v 13** *Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.* The villain of this section is sin: sin seized the opportunity afforded it when the law showed what was right and what was wrong, without supplying the power to do the former and avoid the latter. Sin forced against better judgment to do what the law showed to be wrong, and thus caused condemnation and death. Consequently, I appreciated, as I should not otherwise have done, just how sinful, how contrary to God and goodness, sin actually is.

**The Inner Conflict**

This moves from the look back at the history of Israel, to consider Israel’s ongoing experience, that is, the present reality for the non-christian Jew. Paul identified with both of these, since he was a member of the people of Israel and her history is his history, and he was, prior to his conversion experience a Jew living under the law. This is a Christian analysis of the general malaise of fallen humanity when it comes to sin, death and the Law, and the truth is that only by coming to the point of being convicted, convinced, and converted is it likely for fallen persons to see themselves as described here.

**v 14** *For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.* Paul starts this with ‘we’ to include himself with members of his audience in what he is about to say. Having described the law as holy, good and righteous, he now describes it as ‘spiritual.’ Of the 24 times Paul uses ‘spiritual’ in his letters, only once does it not refer to things that are God given and inspired. (Eph 6:12 – the spiritual forces of evil.) Here one can use the predominant sense, that the law is spiritual because it is God given.

**Year 2 Week 11 – Romans 7 The Inner Conflict**

**Classic Parallels Regarding Moral Weakness –** (reflect here on 1:18-23)

Attention has been drawn to statements by classical authors that appear similar to Paul’s depiction of humanity’s inability to perform the good they want to do and to desist from the evil they do not want to do. Huggins lists the following as examples:

**Euripides** (c. 480–406 b.c.): ‘That which is good we learn and recognize, yet practice not the lesson, some from sloth, and some preferring pleasure in the stead of duty’. (*Hippolytus* 379–83)

**Plato** (427–347 b.c.): ‘… most people … say that many, while knowing what is best, refuse to perform it’. (*Protagoras* 352d)

**Aristotle** (384–322 b.c.): ‘The man … does not think the action right before he comes under the influence of passion’. (*Ethica Nicomachea* 7.2)

**Plautus** (c. 254–184 b.c.): ‘I know what sort I ought to be, but I couldn’t be it, poor fool’. (*Trinummas* 657–58)

**Ovid** (43 b.c.–a.d. 17): ‘I see the better and approve it; but I follow the worse’. (*Metamorphosis* 7.21)

To these may be added:

**Epictetus** (a.d. 55–135): ‘What I will I do not do and what I do not will I do’. (*Dissertations* 2.26.4)

In addition to the passages cited above, consider Euripides’ drama, *Medea* (c. 455 b.c.): The myth of Medea contains a scene that is the fount of a discussion in Greco-Roman moral philosophy that partially parallels the sentiment of 7:15. The tradition looks back to Euripides’ *Medea* (ca. 455 b.c.) as its source. As the scene opens, Medea has been told that Jason is going to send her away and marry Creon’s daughter. Both Medea and her sons by Jason will be banished from the land. In rage she deliberates with herself how to take revenge on Jason; she will kill their sons to injure him. As she moves toward this decision, she argues furiously with herself. At one point she talks herself out of the deed, but in the end Medea follows through with her plot. The decision is sealed: ‘Though indeed I learn what sort of evil I am about to commit, still wrath is greater than my resolutions’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

For Socrates: ‘(1) evil conduct stems from ignorance rather than the overwhelming of better judgment by the passions, and (2) right knowledge inevitably leads to right conduct’. This is clearly different than Paul’s depiction of the human inability to do the good they know.

**The identity of the ‘I’ in 7:7-25:** The significance of Paul’s use of the first person singular in 7:7–25 has been interpreted in many different ways, including appeals to Hellenistic psychology, identification with various aspects of Paul’s own experience (autobiographical approaches), identification with humanity in general or with Israel the nation and/or Jewish people (rhetorical approaches). It may be enough to say that he has a forceful desire to state what is true for all (in Adam), rooted in his own personal involvement in what he says as a Jew who understood what it meant to live under the law.

**v 15** *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* Our moral weakness is perplexing to us. His evidence for *‘I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin,’* is the fact that he does not understand what he does. The bondage of the ‘I’ to sin is seen in its inability to carry out the good deeds that it wants to do and its inability to refrain from doing the evil things that it despises (hypocrite?). This echoes all these classical authors, though Paul gives a unique depiction of human moral weakness.

**v 16** *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.* This is the conclusion from the previous facts. This is significantly different from Phil 3:6, when he says that he was in respect to *‘righteousness based on the law, faultless.’* That was a statement of his Jewish credentials. The point here is that from a Christian perspective, there is the acknowledgement that the law is good.

**v 17** *But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.* The blame for Israel’s current predicament lies upon sin. The ‘I’, Israel as Paul perceives her living under the law, wants to keep the law, but the sin the dwells within her (us) causes it to transgress the law. By blaming ‘sin,’ Paul is not denying human responsibility for sinful actions, but recognizing ‘sin’ as a power operating within humanity. Our deliverance comes not through observance of the law enabling the good impulse to triumph, but rather through what God has done in Christ.

**v 18** *For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.* He continues to depict not only his personal experience, but also that of Jewish people under the law. Like the rest of humanity, they are nor altogether evil, for the desire to do good is present, but the capacity to do so is lacking because of the sinful nature.

**v 19** *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.* This repeats v 15. By arguing the inability to carry out the good because of the power of indwelling sin, Paul shows that sin is responsible for the problem and not the law.

**v 20** *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.* This statement reinforces Paul’s rebuttal of claims that his gospel involves a denigration of the law. The problem is sin, not the law.

**v 21** *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.* The ‘law’ that he finds here is simply that which is inevitable. Most of this section distinguishes between the ‘Law of God’ and the ‘Law of Sin, but this verse introduces on more category, the ‘Law of Inevitability.’

**v 22** *For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,* This repeats 16b with nuance. “Taking delight,” is comparable to ‘what I want’ (15, 18b, 19, 21). This ‘I’ could be not only the Jew zealous for the Torah, but also the pagan, struggling with the mind to master the spirit and natural cravings from the perspective of deliverance.

**v 23** *but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* This hints at the duality of the law which is good, holy, just and spiritual, for life, yet the stimulator of sin, an imprisoning force, and an instrument of death. The distinction is not between two different laws, but between the different operations and effects of the same law. The biggest stumbling block to this view is Paul’s qualification of the *nomos* in v. 23a as “another.”

**Year 2 Week 12 – Romans 7 The Inner Conflict**

**v 24** *Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* Paul’s depiction of the war being waged between the law of the mind and the law of sin within the members of the ‘I’ leads him add: *What a wretched man I am!* To be ‘wretched’ is the opposite of being ‘blessed’. It means to be miserable, in mental or emotional turmoil. The ‘wretchedness’ of the ‘I’ here consists in its being in slavery to sin, a slavery from which it is unable to rescue itself. Hence the cry: *Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*

**v 25** *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.* It is astonishing to find this outbreak of triumph immediately after the anguished cry, ‘Who will deliver me?’ But here is the answer: ‘God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God!’Just how this deliverance from the power of indwelling sin may be appropriated is described more fully in the next chapter; for the moment, after this brief indication that the situation is not so hopeless as the ‘wretched man’ feared, Paul goes back to summarize the moral predicament of verses 14–24. These final words of the chapter provide a negative foil for Paul’s presentation of Christian freedom that is to follow in chapter 8.

**Romans 8 – Life in the Spirit - (The Great 8)**

Remembering that Paul began this section as a defense against the accusation that his gospel denigrates God’s law, he began in ch 7 to speak of life in the new way of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was not mentioned in ch 7, but now in ch 8 the Spirit becomes the main character of God’s activity in the world. It is a move from the problem of the law and its servitude to sin to the power of the Holy Spirit with the promise of God’s final victory over the powers of evil. Set forth is the contrast between flesh and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is far more powerful and will even be able to save our mortal bodies (11). Those who belong to the new order of the Spirit will fulfill the law by doing the will of God from the heart. The Spirit gives Christ to us; He makes us spiritual, subdues the flesh, and assures us that we are still God’s children. Since nothing is so good for the mortifying of the flesh as the cross and suffering, he comforts us in suffering with the support of the Spirit of love, and the whole creation with the Spirits sighs within us longing for the time we will be rid of sin and all its destructive power. These three chapters (6-8) drive home the one task of faith, to slay the old Adam and subdue the flesh.

**v 1** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* The immediate context for ‘therefore’ refers back to the rescue of believers from their bondage to sin under the law. Read it as ‘there is no condemnation (by the law).’ The word *katakrima* here means ‘probably not “condemnation”, but the punishment following sentence’ —in other words, penal servitude. In 5:16, Paul explains that condemnation for all people followed Adam’s sin, which now contrasts with justification for all those who believe because of Christ’s obedience. ‘Now’ is the new time in salvation history inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Where there is no condemnation, there is forgiveness of sins. In contrast to the despair of bondage that characterized ch 7, Paul now writes in the joy of freedom. To be ‘in Christ’ means to belong to Christ and to live in the realm where His power and Lordship are experienced. God has adjudicated in our favor and no charge against us can stand, no one can condemn us.

**v 2** *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* This is further explanation of the declaration made in v1. The reasoning begins, ‘For’ or because through Christ the law of the Spirit has set you free. There are two ‘laws’ to consider, or two ways that Paul thinks about the law. The first is the law of Moses. Dunn, for example, says: ‘Paul is able to think of the law in two different ways: the law caught in the nexus of sin and death, where it is met only by *sarx* [‘flesh’], is the law as *gramma* [‘letter’], caught in the old epoch, abused and destructive…; but the law rightly understood, and responded to *en pneumati ou grammati* [‘by Spirit, not by letter’] is pleasing to God (2:29)’. Second is the law as rule or principle. Paul is saying that the principle of life in the Spirit sets people free from the principle of sin and death that would otherwise reign in their lives. [[24]](#footnote-24)  The second meaning is preferred here because it allows v 1-2 to be read as the climax to 7:22-25 and as an introduction to what follows in 8:3-17. Beginning in 3 Paul explains not the function of the Mosaic law, but the role of the Spirit in overcoming the sinful impulses operating in humanity. (see also 2Cor 3:17, Gal 5:13)

**v 3**  *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* The law is good, but it is powerless because the sinful nature cannot keep it. The lack of ability of the law to save us resides in the lack of our ability to be obedient. The weakness is found in us, in the *sarx*, in our fallen nature.[[25]](#footnote-25) The law does not save because it cannot save, which is what Paul has been laboring throughout the letter. The Holy Spirit knows how weak we are in our grasp of the gospel, and like dogs that keep returning to their vomit we keep falling back to the idea that somehow we can justify ourselves by our behavior, good deeds, and morality. Paul has come at this from every angle to get rid of that idea and to brush off the spot where that idea once stood, reiterating that the law cannot do it.[[26]](#footnote-26) “But what the law could not do [see the contrast here] God did.” There in a nutshell is the gospel. What our morality can never achieve, God can achieve. What our behavior and performance are incapable of attaining, God can attain for us. That is the gospel. We cannot; He can. It is that simple. God sent His Son ‘in the likeness’ of sinful flesh suggesting similarity while recognizing distinctions. The Son is without sin, but in every other way, the incarnation is Christ taking on our original state to the point of temptation. The Son comes in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering. Sin is condemned in the ‘flesh’ of Jesus Christ, when He presented Himself as a sin offering. The condemnation that humanity’s sin deserved was absorbed by the incarnate Christ when He died on the cross. This breaks sins power over humanity; for those ‘in Christ Jesus’ sin no longer reigns (5:21).

**Year 2 Week 13 – Romans 8 Life in the Spirit**

**v 4** *so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* The law’s ‘just requirement’ is summed up in 13:9 in the single commandment, *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself*’ (Gal 5:13-16). This is different from OT, where it is plural. This is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 31:33; also Eze 11:19-20, 36:26-27), where God undertakes to give His people a ‘new heart’ and a ‘new spirit’ – in fact His own Spirit, sent to dwell within them so that they will do His will spontaneously. To live according to the flesh is to live under the law. *‘Might be fulfilled’* (passive) is not the same as believers fulfilling (active) this requirement. ‘*To walk’* refers to the way people should live and behave. This is not about achieving these requirements by a continuously careful observation of the law’s many stipulations.

**v 5**  *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* The unsaved sinner is described by a mind-set. What is the focus of our life? What are we thinking about? It is not about whether we ever think about goals, ambitions, desires and appetites of the world, but is this where our minds are set on a regular basis, that these have primary focus in our lives. We do not know where we will be in ten or twenty years. What matters is where we are in 100 years. Minds set on the flesh and the world will be suffering judgment in 100 years. Minds that are concerned with the things of God, the Spirit of God, the truth of God, will enjoy the inheritance God has promised to His children. It is easy, it is natural for us to set our minds on the things of this world such that we go through life missing the things of eternity. Galatians 5:16-24 gives the best example of what it means to have one’s mind set on what the Spirit desires. A mind-set on what the sinful nature desires give place to every kind of evil. A mind set on the things of the Spirit gives place to the fruit of the Spirit and every good thing that flows from that. Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the specific precepts of an external law-code; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit’s producing his fruit in one’s life, reproducing those graces which were seen in perfection in the life of Christ. ‘Grace was given’, as Augustine said, ‘that the law might be fulfilled.’

*Not until, by the death and resurrection of Christ, the new creation had come into being, did it become possible for God to send the Spirit of his Son into the hearts of lost and helpless men; and with the Spirit came life, freedom and power. Those who live by the Spirit, as Paul says, produce the fruits of the Spirit. A vine does not produce grapes by Act of Parliament; they are the fruit of the vine’s own life; so the conduct which conforms to the standard of the Kingdom is not produced by any demand, not even God’s, but it is the fruit of that divine nature which God gives as the result of what he has done in and by Christ.[[27]](#footnote-27)*

**v 6**  *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* Once the description is given for those of the flesh and the Spirit, now we look at the final outcome of each type of person. There is nothing but death for the mind set on the flesh, while life and peace are the reward and inheritance of the mind of the Spirit. Satan told Eve, ‘You will not die.’ If you repeat a lie often enough, people will begin to believe it, and they not only will believe it, but they also will defend it as truth. Our culture is permeated with the idea that there is no war between man and God. We hear, “God hates the sin but loves the sinner.” We hear that God loves everybody unconditionally, but that is the biggest lie of our day, because He does not. At the last judgment God will not send sins to hell; he will send sinners to hell. Even though sinners enjoy the blessings of God’s providential love, His filial love is not their desert.[[28]](#footnote-28) The Bible gives graphic images of God’s attitude toward the ‘stiff-necked.’

**v 7**  *For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot,* God is the ultimate obstacle to man’s ability to find happiness in the desires of the flesh. God is always standing in the way. The life of the flesh is not neutral. To be focused on the flesh is to be hostile to God. Our nature is to hate God because of His law. We do not want to be subject to the law of God. When the media covers ethical issues, the church is often set aside. People want the right to do whatever they want, to live out their preferences and satisfy their appetites, without running into the wall that is the law of God.

**v 8**  *and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* (non posse non peccare) The mind of the flesh is hostile to God, which means it is not now nor can ever be subject to the law of God. This is bondage to that sinful nature.

**v 9**  *But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* These words are meant to assure his readers that they are not included among those who are in the flesh; they are not like those described in 7:5. On the contrary, they are in the Spirit, and in this respect they are like those described in 7:6. Since it is the Spirit alone who brings people into a living relationship with Christ, there can be no such relation with Christ apart from the Spirit. Paul’s purpose in this verse is positive, to give assurance that because they are in the Spirit they do belong to Christ. He does not say, ‘we are in the Spirit if we have the victorious Christian life.’ There is one condition only, that the Spirit dwells within us. We cannot be Christians unless the Holy Spirit regenerates us and changes our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Think of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. “*Unless a man is born of the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God, nor enter it.”* The Spirit indwells every person whom He regenerates. When we are born of the Spirit, we are signed, sealed, and delivered. We still fight the ongoing battle with sin, but with the Spirit in us, we are not in the flesh. We are in the Spirit and the promises of God apply to us. (Consider Matthew 7:21-23)

**v 10** *But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* There is much debate on this verse as to whether it refers to the human ‘spirit’ or the Holy Spirit of God. Is it, “the spirit is alive” or “The Spirit gives life” because of righteousness? Paul appears to mean that the Spirit is the source of life. We are subject to death, but receive life in the Holy Spirit because of the righteousness of God.

**Year 2 Week 14 – Romans 8 Life in the Spirit**

**v 11** *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.* This raises the question of the assurance of salvation. Assurance was a point of contention in the reformation, with the Roman Catholic insistence that giving assurance would end the works of those seeking to attain God’s favor. (Think – end of indulgences, good works, penance and all those things that brought money into the church from those who had no assurance) It is intimately connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and the work of the Spirit in raising Jesus from the dead. There is false assurance based on false premises that either depends on works, or a form of universalism. True assurance is based upon Jesus’ righteousness and the Holy Spirit.

**v 12** *So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—* We are no longer like slaves subject to our master’s sin and death. We do not owe the flesh anything. We have no obligation to the lusts of our fallen nature. This may not initially seem like good news to us, especially when we recognize how much sin there continues to be in our lives. We might ask, “How can I have the Spirit and continue to struggle this way?” We know that being converted and in God’s grace does not guarantee the end of temptation and our falling into disobedience. We live in that tension, as Luther says, *“simul justus et peccator.”* (simultaneously saint and sinner)

**v 13** *for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* If we can be sure of our salvation only by putting to death all the sins of our flesh, then we have little reason to be sure of salvation. In several places Paul uses ‘flesh’ and ‘body’ as nearly synonymous, but in some he compares and contrasts them (Col 2:11, 23; 3:3; Gal 6:8). We still have the question of how to put to death the deeds of the body (7:13) or crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24) and sow to please the Spirit (Gal 6:8). Or is it that we cannot do it such that we must call upon and depend upon God to produce the fruits of the Spirit within us?

**v 14** *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.* There is no mistake where the initiative lies – *they are led by the Spirit of God*. The essential element (*sine qua non*)of the Christian life is possession of the Holy Spirit. Believers are described as those who are ‘led’ by the Spirit. Paul may have intended a reference to the OT Israelites led by God our of Egypt and through the wilderness into the Promised Land. Led by the Spirit stands in contrast to the need to put to death the misdeeds of the body. Paul follows this line also in Gal 5:18. In Galatians it is an extended exhortation to live by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh. It is significant that Paul describes believers as those who are

‘led’ (passive) by the Spirit. The emphasis here is on a moral transformation, not vocational in this context. The use of ‘children of God’ implies two privileges: (i) because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit into our hearts, that Spirit who calls out “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6), and (ii) they are ‘led by the Spirit’.

**v 15** *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”* There is a healthy ‘fear of God’ (3:8; 2Cor 5:11; 7:1; Eph 5:21; Phil 2:12) far different for this fear. This is fear of a harsh master. Instead, the Spirit confers upon us all the rights and privileges of a natural child. The word for adoption does not appear in the LXX, and the practice of adoption appears to be rare among Jewish people although very common in the Greco-Roman world. The OT does often talk about Israel becoming God’s son. The exodus may be regarded as the adoption of Israel by God. The Spirit received by believers creates within them a sense of intimacy with God. Jesus used *“Abba, Father”* when praying to His Father.

**v 16** *it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* We come to the deepest and highest level of assurance of salvation that we can achieve in this world: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit*. The word spirit is used to refer both to the Holy Spirit and our spirit. This is a spiritual conversation, a spiritual communication that comes from the Holy Spirit to the human spirit, indicating that we are *the children of God*. Our assurance is not a logical deduction from our theology. It is not a certainty based on a careful examination of our works and behavior. Our final assurance comes by the testimony of God the Holy Spirit, who bears witness with and through our spirits that we are children of God. This is not the Spirit whispering in our ear, but the Spirit who communicates with God’s people by the Word, with the Word, through the Word, and never against the Word. There are many who claim to be led by the Spirit into sin and disobedience. It is important to understand that if we lack assurance, and want our hearts to be at peace, we must go to the Word. The Spirit confirms His truth to us in and through the Word. If we claim to be led by the Spirit, we must immerse ourselves in the Spirit-inspired Word.

**v 17** *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.* In v14 Paul used ‘sons’ which the NRSV translated as children (inclusiveness). In v16-17 Paul has switched to children. It is significant that when Paul speaks of heirs of God, he no longer refers to them as ‘sons.’ He is speaking to a community that he does not know in Rome, where the issue of the right to inheritance for women had been contested. From the time of Cicero Roman legal practice had favored daughters and well as sons having the right inheritance. To be adopted as God’s children means to become heirs, ‘co-heirs with Christ’ means to share in the inheritance that God gives to Christ. It is also important to connect this inheritance to God’s promise to Abraham, which Paul says, consist of ‘the world’ (4:13). The inheritance promised to believers and forfeited by the ungodly, it consists of ‘the kingdom of God’ (1Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; James 2:50 and ‘eternal life’ (Tit 3:7; 1 Pet 3:7). Those who are to be co-heirs with Christ must identify with Him in a hostile world now. For Paul, there is a necessary link between suffering and glory. In 2 Cor 4:16-17 he describes our reality, that, ‘though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed everyday.’ These afflictions, which wear down the outer nature are the very means the Spirit of God uses to renew the inner being day by day until the ‘new man’ is fully formed after the image of Christ. Thus these ‘light and momentary troubles’ are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (an eternal weight of glory). This verse provides an introduction into v18-27, which give an extended treatment of suffering and the Spirit.

**Year 2 Week 15 – Romans 8 Future Glory**

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;

20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;

23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

*God’s Love in Christ Jesus*

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;

we are accounted 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, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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