

# **Grace Presbyterian Church Bible Studies**

## **Romans**

## Welcome to our on-line Bible study for 2010.

### The Epistle to the Romans: The Victory of God – Chapter 1:1-18

Paul's letter to the Romans is probably the most influential single book of the New Testament. It has had an enormous influence in church history right up to the present day. It has also been the subject of much discussion and debate. In this study we will try to provide some guidelines and perspective on this most exciting and challenging New Testament text.

#### I. Why is Paul writing to the Romans?

In his opening address Paul acknowledges that he has wanted to visit the church at Rome several times but up to this point he has been prevented from doing so (1:11-13). This then sets the letter to the Romans apart from other letters of Paul which are addressed to churches that he knew or even help start.

Paul represents a double perspective. His background is that of being 'a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees' (Acts 23:6). As such he was an expert in the Jewish law (Phil. 3:5). Yet Paul's mission was to be an apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jews of the Roman Empire and beyond (Gal. 2:7-8). The goal of his mission is "to bring about the obedience of the faith among all the Gentiles" (1:5). In the Greek the word "all" with an article, as in "all *the* Gentiles" usually means all inclusive as in Herod ordered the deaths of "all the children" in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). Paul later defines his ministry as proclaiming the gospel, "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (or "Gentile") (Rom. 1:16). Understanding the focus of Paul's ministry in this opening section is crucial to understanding the whole letter to the Romans. To appreciate the crucial issues in interpreting the letter it is worth reviewing some of the ways this important letter has been understood in the history of the church.

#### II. Interpreting the Epistle to the Romans -

The most important interpreter of the letter to the Romans in the early church was Augustine (354-430). Augustine, coming out of the Greek heritage of the Roman Empire, saw Romans as a response to human pride and confidence in human goodness. Over against these traits which he found in philosophy he interpreted Romans as an indictment of human sin and the need for God's grace alone for salvation. Augustine saw grace ultimately as the source of an individual's being right with God based on God's predestination. Martin Luther (1483-1546) followed Augustine but was concerned by the Medieval Church's emphasis on human merit through good works. Luther stressed faith as a gift from God and understood Romans as teaching that salvation was by faith alone (Rom. 1:17). Luther's great insight was that "the

righteousness of God" (1:17) was not the righteousness which God requires of us but rather the righteousness which God gives us as a free gift in Jesus Christ.

John Calvin (1509-1564) and the subsequent Reformed and Presbyterian tradition essentially followed Luther's role. The greatest American Presbyterian commentary was written by the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878).

This approach, following Augustine, emphasized the following points in their reading of Romans:

1. Romans teaches that all are sinners (Rom. 3:23).
2. Good works, including the works of the law, are completely inadequate for salvation (Rom. 3:20).
3. A person is saved only by God's grace (underserved favor) through faith (trust) in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:1-16).
4. Once saved by grace through faith nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:31-39).
5. Our salvation is not based on us in any way but comes from God. Indeed God elected or predestined us for salvation before we were born solely by his free choice (Rom. 9:6-24).
6. Jews as well as Gentiles share in God's grace through faith in Christ (Rom. 11).
7. Having been saved solely by God's grace we should serve God not by following the law literally but by following its spirit as an expression of our love and gratitude to God for the gift of salvation (Rom. 12:1-13; 13:8-10).

This has been the standard interpretation of Romans in the Protestant and Reformed tradition. There is no question that it is based on a number of clear and definite passages in the book. However this interpretation, as good as it is, leaves a number of themes in the epistle unanswered:

1. In chapter 2 Paul speaks of Gentiles receiving eternal life "by patiently doing good" (Rom. 2:7). This seems to contradict the later emphasis that all are under sin and condemnation (Rom. 3:10-20).
2. The traditional interpretation does not seem to deal adequately with such important themes as creation (Rom. 1:20; 8:19-23) and the history of Israel (Rom. Chapters 4, 9-11). If Paul's focus is on "faith among all the Gentiles," (1:5) why does he spend so much time on Israel's history (chapters 9-11)? What does Paul mean when he says, "all Israel will be saved" (11:26)?
3. The traditional interpretation doesn't fully answer the question of why Paul is writing to the Romans in the first place. Paul speaks several times of being hindered in coming to Rome (1:13; 15:22). He speaks of wanting to be sent on to Spain by the Romans (15:22-29). He speaks as a missionary about his "ministry" (11:13; 15:25-32). Is the letter to Romans perhaps a "missionary letter?"
4. What does Paul mean by "mystery," a term mentioned here (11:25; 16:25) as well as in a number of other epistles (Eph. 1:9; 2:19; I Cor. 2:1; 15:51; Col. 1:26-27)?

In the past hundred years there have been many commentaries written on Romans seeking to answer all these questions. Almost a century ago Karl Barth (1886-1968) wrote a commentary which sought to expand on the traditional Reformed view by seeing Paul as raising questions about human culture, not only individuals and the issue of personal sin and guilt. Barth also saw Paul as emphasizing a further dimension of human sin, that we cannot comprehend anything valid about God apart from God's revelation in Christ (1:18-23; 8:7). This is a theme that was also found in Calvin. This point raises the question that if people in sin have no capacity to understand the gospel how do we share its message with them?

For more than thirty years we have seen what some have called a "new perspective on Paul." This chiefly has emphasized Paul's continuity not only with his own Jewish background but with Judaism in general. These scholars have pointed out that the idea that Jews believed they were saved by keeping the law is simply not true. Paul's problem with the law, according to them, is not that the law promises a salvation by works but rather with the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is now the complete fulfillment or end of the law (10:4). One of the proponents of this approach, James D. G. Dunn, wrote an excellent commentary on Romans (1988) where he saw Paul's central theme as "to the Jew first and also to the Greek," emphasizing the continuity of God's promises to Israel with those made to Gentiles in Jesus Christ (11:29).

### III. So where do we go from here?

Paul's opening statement in Romans emphasizes three central themes which should alert us to his purpose in writing.

1. Paul himself has been "set apart" for the gospel. Paul's view of his role as an apostle will be crucial in understanding his message here (1:1).
2. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of God (1:2-3). It is the power of God "to everyone who has faith," to the Jew first and also the Greek (1:16). What does Paul mean by "Jew first?" Is it first in priority or first in sequence? Is it just the case that Israel received the promise first historically?
3. This promise is for the benefit of the Gentiles "including yourselves" (1:6). Paul is debtor both to Greeks and Barbarians (1:14). We will need to understand how he, as a Pharisee, can make such a claim.

In the course of this study I would like to explore another view of Romans which I first encountered in a study at Princeton Seminary over twenty years ago. This is the view that Paul's epistle here is ultimately a picture of God's future plan for all creation, humans (Jew and Gentile), spirits, powers, everything God called into being. If this is the case Paul is interpreting all the events of the present in the light of God's final, planned outcome, not only for individuals but for all humanity, all creation. Then the key text of the epistle might be,

“For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:11b-12).

## Questions for Discussion –

1. What do you see as the most important statement in Rom. 1:1-17? Why?
2. Romans has often been seen as an anti-religious book (this was a major emphasis of Karl Barth). Why do you think this is?
3. However we interpret Paul, especially in this opening section, he is full of confidence. What is it about the gospel that gives us confidence?

## Chapter 1:18-32 - “The Marks of Futile Thinking”

The second section of chapter 1 is Paul’s account of the fall of humanity. As Paul presents it he seems to have a broader view than just the disobedience of Adam and Eve. For him it appears the fall continues up until the time of Noah when every inclination of the human heart “was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Paul’s perspective here is cosmic because he goes from creation to the last judgment of God’s wrath. That wrath is already operative in human history. Apart from God’s truth our senseless minds have become darkened (1:21).

- I. Paul begins with the disturbing statement that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness” (1:18). For Paul the “wrath of God” is an eschatological or future event. It refers to God’s final judgment at the end of history on human sin and rebellion (Rom. 2:5, 8; 5:9; I Thess. 1:10; 5:9; II Thess. 1:5-10; I Cor. 15:24-26). We will see as Paul develops his argument that this wrath applies to all humanity in sin. There are no exceptions (Eph. 2:1-3).
- II. Paul makes plain that God has continually revealed himself. Paul, in contrast to the Greeks and Romans, did not believe that humans could directly comprehend or know God. God is only known through his revelation or revealing of himself. Ever since creation God has revealed himself. He has shown himself or, as Paul says elsewhere, he has never left himself without a witness (Acts 14:17). Even after Adam and Eve sin and come under the power of death God still calls to them (Gen. 3:9). Yet God can still be seen, not directly, but through his works (Ps. 19:1).
- III. The problem however is that we have no knowledge of God. Yet we have no excuse for not knowing him. There was a knowledge of God even after the fall. God spoke directly to Cain (Gen. 4:9). Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24). Then however something more serious happened. Human beings started to turn to other gods and god-like beings (“sons of God”). These cosmic beings themselves began to rebel against God (Ps. 82). By the time of the flood these beings were even having sexual relations with humans (Gen. 6:1-2). We initially read of the “sons of God” taking wives from the daughters of humans. From later events we know that the reverse also occurred (Num. 25:1-3). The problem here was far more than sexual immorality. It was idolatry. Classic mythology has its own account of these events but without the revelation of the true God. The net result was that humanity plunged completely and irrevocably into sin. God’s indictment was clear and powerful: “. . . every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This is not to say that all human thought and action was evil. Yet the inclination toward evil was always there.
- IV. Turning away from God and going our own way (Isa. 53:6) humanity’s thinking becomes futile. Paul saw this in the philosophy of his age as well as the mythology (Acts 17:16-31; 14:11-15). For Paul the ultimate deadly sin is idolatry. This has its roots back in the serpent’s temptation: “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). Paul then says, “Claiming to be wise they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images . . .” (1:22). It doesn’t matter what image, goal or picture we worship in the place of God. It could be wealth, sex, prestige, comfort or whatever. Ultimately all these are a form of worshipping ourselves. When we try to live without depending on God for all things (Matt. 6:25-33) we end up becoming, in effect, our own god.
- V. Paul’s concept of divine wrath is very striking. Paul does not invoke the images of the Valley of Hinnom (Isa. 66:54) used by other New Testament writers (Mark 9:48); Rev. 20:15) although there is a reference in II Thessalonians to Christ taking vengeance “in flaming fire” on those who do not obey the gospel (II Thess. 1:8). Here Paul’s picture of judgment is the devastating, “God gave them up” (1:24, 26, 28).

VI. This being given up turns humans away from their own humanity to “the lusts of their hearts” (Gal. 5:19-21). This leads to the “degrading passions,” a mixture of sexuality and idolatry that was so pervasive in the ancient world (Jer. 3:2; Hosea 4:14; Amos 2:7; Acts 19:23-32). The breakdown of sexuality is multi-faceted and leads to homosexuality (1:26-27). There is no question that Paul’s immediate focus here was to practices that certainly existed in the ancient world including everything from goddess worship through temple prostitutes (I Cor. 6:15-16) to sons having sex with their father’s (second) wife (I Cor. 5:1-2) to pederasty and even child sacrifice (II Kings 16:2-3; 17:17). Nonetheless Paul is clearly addressing the basic issue that sexual immorality corrodes an entire society because it is an attack on the family and ultimately on the reality that humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). In uncontrolled sexuality humans revert to the animal.

We need however to note that Paul is not taking the position of later Christian thinkers from Tertulian to Augustine that sexuality itself is sinful. Nothing in the teaching of the New Testament states that. The Old Testament has numerous passages celebrating sexuality (Prov. 5:19; Ezek. 16:6-8; Song of Solomon 7:1-9). Paul, like Jesus, is not speaking against natural sexual desire (cf. vv. 26-27). Paul is not even speaking against pagan practices per se. He himself acknowledges that Christians can participate in pagan dinners for example recognizing that idols have no real existence (I Cor. 8:4). This was not the view in later New Testament situations (Rev. 2:20). Context is very important. Paul counsels Christians to be careful of the impact of their freedom on other weaker Christians (Rom. 14; I Cor. 8). The later church view that, especially beginning with Tertulian, treats sex with suspicion and regards sexual sin as somehow unpardonable does not have Biblical support. The overly negative view of sexuality has hampered the church often in its witness.

VII. Finally the indictment covers humanity’s debased mind in general (1:28). In turning away from God toward idolatry everything collapses. We are confronted with “every kind of wickedness,” from murder to gossip (1:29-32). As we will see later no one is immune from the effects of sin. Sinful practices for Paul are not the cause of sin but rather the result of it. Idolatry leads to everything else. Paul here has summarized the human condition from Adam to Noah. His next question focuses on the issue of Jew vs. Gentile in God’s plan of redemption.

### **Questions for Discussion –**

1. What are some examples of idolatry for us? Why do we find it so hard to depend simply on God in everything?
2. How do you understand the idea of God giving people up? Is God fair to do this? Why or why not?
3. How can we both warn against the danger of “degrading passions” and at the same time affirm that sex, like everything else, is part of God’s creation and indeed should reflect God’s “eternal power and divine nature?”

## Chapter 2:1-29 - “No Excuse”

Paul's second chapter in Romans addresses the issue of spiritual pride. Paul here is continuing a detailed argument, begun at 1:18, which will take him all the way through chapter 11. It must be said that while the argument is detailed it is not completely structured. Paul seems to digress and even interrupt himself at points. This epistle was probably dictated by him, having the nature at times of a conversation or a lecture without notes (cf. Rom. 16:22). Paul's perspective however seems to be always on God's final purpose. His point here is no one, certainly not the Jews, have any special claim on God. God shows “no partiality” (2:11).

- I. Paul's first word in this chapter is “therefore,” a key word throughout the epistle as he draws his various conclusions (in our translation it occurs sixteen times). What he is saying is that, given the pervasive sinfulness he detailed in chapter one, no one, Jew or Gentile, is in any position to pass judgment on another. Jesus said essentially the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:1-5). We are certainly called to discern (Rom. 12:2; I Cor. 2:15) and even to test the spirits (I John 4:1) but that's different from passing judgment. This is one of the most difficult lessons for us to learn and is a major proof of our sinfulness (cf. John 8:7).
- II. Paul has in mind, I believe, God's final judgment. This judgment is “in accordance with truth” (2:2). The fact that we are invariably guilty of those things about which we judge others shows that we have not embraced God's “kindness and forbearance and patience” (2:4). Our judgmental attitude is a sign of having a “hard and impenitent heart” (2:5). Paul's critique here is devastating since this is often so true of us as Christians.
- III. Many people find Paul's statement in vs. 6, “For he will repay according to each one's deeds,” puzzling in the light of what he later says about works being inadequate for salvation (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16). Paul here is speaking of God's justice. That justice will repay everyone according to their deeds. This truth is affirmed throughout Scripture (Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12;; John 5:28-29; II Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-9; Eph. 6:7-8; II Tim. 4:14; I Peter 1:17). We can never say that works are unimportant. It is not the case here, or anywhere else, that we can earn salvation by our works. This is not a question of human merit. Nevertheless, God does judge what we do and he shows no partiality. Our works are often a mirror of our faith (Matt. 7:21; 25:31-46).
- IV. Paul goes on to say that those “who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.” Those who do not obey the truth and are self-seeking will face “wrath and fury.” There will be “glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek” (2:7-11). It is important to see what Paul is doing here. He is building his argument in a way that is similar to his message to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34). He affirms general truths which no one in his audience would refute. On Mars Hill he states that in God we live and move and have our being, that we are his offspring (Acts 17:28). He is actually quoting Greek poets. In Romans 2 he is saying things that are in accord with both Jewish prophets and Greek philosophers. At this point however he has not defined what he means by “doing good,” obeying the truth (cf. 1:5) or seeking for glory, honor and immortality. He is speaking in the language of his audience. He is however saying something very important which is consistent with his affirmation that God shows no partiality (2:11).
- VI. He is affirming that God can speak to anyone's heart. God's kindness can lead anyone to repentance (2:4). Gentiles, even without the law, may show that the law has been written on their hearts and will be excused (or accepted) on the day when Jesus will judge the hearts of all (2:14-16). We are in no position to judge these individuals or cases. God however is free to judge and accept. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus had already established that people could be serving him without knowing it (Matt. 25:37-39). This vindication or validation is always a

work of grace not of human pride or achievement. Paul is really saying, how does anyone, Jew or Greek, really do “good” (not just good works) or seek for glory, honor and immortality without the Holy Spirit guiding him or her. After all, as Paul affirms later, we do not even know how to pray (8:26). Paul is establishing here what he will develop in greater detail in chapters 3-5. Everyone is on an equal footing before God. No one, not even the Jews who have the Law and the Covenant, is spiritually superior to anyone else. The judgment of God stands over everyone. At the same time God’s kindness, what he will later define as grace, works freely in human hearts.

- VII. Paul drives home this point by addressing the standing of the Jews. The Jews have the Law. However, having the Law is of no benefit unless one keeps the Law. Yet the Jews have not kept the Law. The Law, he will show, is far more extensive than simply an outward code of behavior. Jesus already established this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). God’s standards are so high and so demanding that we cannot look at others and accuse them of stealing, adultery or idolatry without seeing that we are ultimately guilty of the same things in our thoughts if not our deeds (Matt. 5:27-30). The Law is not in itself an impossible standard (“Lust,” for example, means more than sexual attraction). It is however a high standard. Paul acknowledges that even some Gentiles can “keep the law” (2:26-27). But what does he mean by keeping the law? He is not talking about the “deeds prescribed by the law” (3:20). These are not the same as the “deeds” of doing good or seeking glory (2:7). He is talking about a faith which alone can fulfill the law through love, love of Christ (13:8-10; I Cor. 13). Apart from faith, we will learn, the Law can only be a source of death (7:11-13).
- VIII. Paul points out that circumcision, the outward sign of being a Jew, is only of value if one obeys the Law (2:25). This applies to any religious sign or practice. It is not the outward appearance that is important. God looks on the heart (I Sam. 16:7). Circumcision, even in the Old Testament, was ultimately a matter of the heart (2:29; Deut. 30:6).
- IX. Paul’s argument in chapter 2 then can be summarized as follows:
1. No one has any basis for passing judgment on someone else.
  2. Read no. 1 above again.
  3. God’s kindness (grace) can reach across to anyone, Jew or Greek, whatever their circumstance.
  4. Our deeds matter, not as achieving merit or acceptance before God, but rather as an indication of the longing of our hearts. This raises the question (which Paul will answer), how do our hearts become right before God?
  5. God may be working in the hearts of those who are outside the community of faith (i.e. Gentiles without the law, Rom. 1).

#### Questions for Discussion –

1. Why do you think we fall so easily into the trap of passing judgment on others? What steps can we begin to take to free us from this practice?
2. Why do you think our deeds are so important? How can we know they truly come from our heart?
3. What are some examples of God’s kindness which can lead anyone to repentance even without a religious background?

## Chapter 3:1-8 - “The Faithfulness of God”

If we assume, as we stated earlier, that Paul’s entire perspective in Romans is from the standpoint of God’s final judgment and victory in creation we can better understand his transition from chapter 2 to 3. Paul’s key point in chapter 2 is that God shows no partiality (2:11). Jews are not in a better position than Gentiles spiritually simply because they have the law or have been circumcised. At God’s final judgment these things will not count at all. People will be judged by their deeds, whether or not they have done “good.” The concept of doing good cannot be separated from his statement that “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” (2:4). These themes will be much further developed in chapter 3 where Paul will talk about the true nature of the law and the fact that God’s kindness (or grace as he will say later) is part of God’s righteousness.

### I. The Advantage of the Jew – 3:1-8

- A. Paul asks the rhetorical question, “Then what advantage has the Jew?” (3:1). Somewhat surprisingly, following his discussion in chapter 2, he says “Much, in every way” (3:2). The first point he wants to emphasize is that they received “the oracles of God.” This would be the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Granted, as he said earlier, having the Law is not sufficient in itself. The law must be kept if one relies on it (2:17-24). Nonetheless there is certainly a tremendous benefit in having the Scriptures including the law.
- B. Paul then introduces a major theme of his eschatological and apocalyptic understanding. This has to do with God’s final victory and indeed the important theme of the finality of **the faithfulness of God** (I Cor. 1:9; 10:13; II Cor. 1:18; I Thess. 5:24; II Thess. 3:3; II Tim. 2:13). Paul’s view which is found again and again in his epistles can be summarized as follows:
  1. “What if some were unfaithful? (3:3).” This has clearly been the case as Paul just noted (2:17-24). Paul reminds his readers in Corinth (probably predominantly Gentiles) that most of the Israelites in the Exodus disobeyed God and were not permitted to enter the promised land. This included Moses himself (I Cor. 10:1-5; Num. 20:12).
  2. Paul then adds the counter question, “Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?” Paul immediately adds, “By no means.” God will be proved true no matter how faithless we are (3:4; Ps. 51:4).
  3. Paul now anticipates what will be some of the inevitable debate which will arise from his full discussion of the righteousness of God and salvation. Paul engages in an imagined debate with someone who wants to follow Paul’s claims out to their logical conclusion.

4. Paul's debater goes a step beyond the claim that God's faithfulness continues in the face of human faithlessness. The implication (which we will see is true) is that God's justice (or righteousness) is revealed and confirmed in our injustice. Paul will later say, "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). The logic of this then could be "Let us do evil so that good may come" (3:8) or, as Paul will add later, "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (6:1). If our sin results in God's greater grace and mercy, then why does God condemn us for it (3:5)?
  5. All this may be logical but it is not true. In Paul's benediction at the end of First Thessalonians he says, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 5:23). He then adds, "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do this" (I Thess. 5:24). Using the same logic Paul is criticizing in Romans 3, one could say, "If God who is faithful will "do this," then I don't have to worry about being responsible for my spirit, soul and body being kept blameless. Indeed my faithlessness cannot possibly nullify God's faithfulness (3:3;). It is true that
    - a. God will do this
    - b. Nothing can stop God or frustrate his will because
    - c. God is always faithful.
  6. Paul doesn't even bother to refute this view. He simply states, "Their condemnation is deserved!" (3:8). Paul's dismissive attitude arises from the fact that God's faithfulness and justice (righteousness) can never be used as an excuse for sin. Nonetheless Paul's basic affirmation will stand. God will be proved true even if everyone is a liar (3:4). Paul will never back down on his affirmation that God's faithfulness is in no way negated by our faithlessness (II Tim. 2:13). Failure to recognize Paul's primary affirmation here has led to confusion and even faulty belief in the church. Paul could not be more removed from Socrates' conviction that we can be virtuous (or righteous) if we really make the effort.
- C. All this is necessary for what will follow. Having established that God shows no partiality and that he is always faithful Paul is now prepared to present the full reality of sin and the power of the gospel. This foundation is absolutely essential since Paul's fundamental claim will be that God's salvation neither depends nor is contingent upon human effort, much less human righteousness.
- D. Paul therefore has made a major turn in his argument. He is no longer speaking about Jew and Gentile and how they obey or don't obey the law "written on their hearts" (2:15). He will now focus on God's actions, the revelation of the righteousness of God.

## Questions for us –

1. What are the advantages Paul has in mind when speaking about the Jews (3:1-2)? Which of those advantages apply to us as Christians? How do we make use of them?
2. Why is the theme of the faithfulness of God so important to Paul? How does this truth affect the way we live?
3. How do we answer the person who says God will always forgive me no matter what I do because God is always faithful in spite of my unfaithfulness?

## Chapter 3:9-20 “All Accountable”

Throughout the entire section of Rom. 1:18-11:36 Paul is developing one sustained argument. In the course of this argument he develops a number of critical themes, all relating to the central subject of the righteousness of God. This theme was introduced in the concluding part of the introduction (1:17). Paul's argument takes the form of a dialogue with the reader somewhat similar to Socrates' dialogues. Paul is not presenting a purely logical account. He is however unfolding a sequence of ideas from his perspective of God's final plan and purpose.. Up to this point he has discussed the severity of sin (1:18-32) and the role of the law as it relates to both Jew and Gentile (chapter 2). He now broadens his argument as he moves to the next stage dealing with the power of sin and the righteousness of God.

### II. The Power of Sin – 3:9

- a. Paul now makes an important shift in his argument. He is no longer talking about the status of Jew and Gentile with regard to the law. He now returns to the earlier indictment of sin (1:18-32). He will now develop the definition of sin in more detail.
- b. Paul's opening statement in 3:9 takes us off guard. In the previous section he has targeted the person who wants to take advantage of God's faithfulness (“Let us do evil so that good may come,” 3:8). He quickly adds, “Their condemnation is deserved” (3:8). Paul then is clearly refuting a slander against his message of grace (“God's kindness,” 2:4). Now however he does an about face and asks the rhetorical question, “Are we any better off?” (3:9). The obvious answer would seem to be, *of course we are*. We are not slandering the gospel. We would certainly want to see ourselves as those who share Paul's conviction that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (1:16). However Paul is saying, do we ourselves have any defense (we thought we had, whether we were Jews or Gentiles)? The answer however is that all of us, “both Jews and Greeks” categorically are **all** literally under the power of sin. To be “under” something in this context is to be under authority or control, hence the NRSV's “under the power of sin” (also Revised English; “all under sin,” NIV; King James, “they are all under sin”).

**Excursus:** The word “all” is critical to Paul's thought. Whereas “all” is often used in a general sense in other books of the New Testament (“all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him” (John the Baptist), Mark 1:5) in Paul it always seems to imply a condition where there are no exceptions. This is certainly the case in Romans whether Paul is writing “to all God's beloved” in Rome (1:7) or affirming a promise like “all things work together for good” (8:28). For Paul to say that “all” are under sin means there is no exception.

This inevitably raises the question (which we can't fully answer here) as to his statements of “all” being justified (Rom. 5:19), receiving God's mercy (Rom. 11:32), being made alive in Christ (I Cor. 15:22), reconciled to God (Col. 1:20) or even God willing that all be saved (I Tim. 2:4). Paul certainly anticipates a final judgment (II Thess. 1:6-8; Phil. 1:28; I Cor. 6:9-10). This is a tension we will have to explore later in Romans. However certain guidelines should be noted. One is that no one can presume on God's goodness or grace (as Paul notes in 3:5-8 or Gal. 6:7-8). Secondly, we need to remember that in Paul's eschatology (which I am arguing is the central theme of his understanding of Christian faith) death is never ultimate. Death never has finality in any form. We will see that death for Paul is not a state of existence (or non-existence). Rather death is a power, a power that has dominion over us and indeed seeks to rival God's power itself (5:17). This power is for Paul “the last enemy” (I Cor. 15: 26).

It is only after its final destruction that Christ's mission will be completed and God will be "all in all," no exceptions, I Cor. 15:28).

### III. The Consequence of Sin – 3:10-20

- a. Paul is not merely saying that we are sinners. Sin in the Old Testament, especially the Torah (five books of Moses), is defined as disobeying God. We see this as far back at the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15-17). Paul however is expanding on that idea. Paul is not only saying we are "in sin." Rather he is saying we are "under sin," under the authority of sin (3:9). The ultimate expression of this authority or rule is death (5:14). For Paul, this is to say that we live in the kingdom of sin. Sin has authority over us completely. Paul therefore speaks of the **power** of sin (I Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:22).
- b. We have no way of breaking free from this power and therefore Paul confronts us with the reality of this sin, quoting from the Old Testament, "as it is written" (3:10; Pss. 14:1-3; 53:1-2; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isa. 59:7-8; Ps. 36:1). The list is devastating: "There is no one who seeks God (3:11), "All have turned aside, together they have become worthless (3:12), "Their throats are opened graves." (3:13).
- c. Paul now states the true purpose of the law. The law in specifying God's will and God's commands holds the whole world accountable to God. There is no escape, no excuse (Ps. 143:2). The final purpose of the law is that it gives us the knowledge of sin (3:20). Yes, Paul would argue, it is true that the doers of the law will be justified (2:13). The reality however is that in the kingdom of sin humanity has lost the capacity to do the works of the law. The promise of the law therefore remains empty and unfulfilled. As Paul will later argue in chapter seven, this is not due to a defect in the law but rather to the brokenness of sin which has overtaken us. The law instead of being the great and joyful guide to life that it was created to be (Ps. 119:1-2) now confronts us inevitably with our sin as certainly as it confronted Israel in its worship of false gods (Ex. 32:1-8). The law contains within itself the provision for atonement, for forgiveness (Lev. 16). Yet no one is able to do the "deeds prescribed by the law" (3:20).
- d. We are left with the condemnation: "There is no one who is righteous, not even one" (3:10; Ps. 14:3). For all the discussion of the law and for all of its value, it offers us no way out of the power of sin. Yet even this was part of the plan of God (Gal. 3:23-24). Paul will now turn to the power of God. This power is found in his righteousness.

#### Questions for Us –

1. Why do we so strongly resist the verdict of our own condemnation – 3:9 (as opposed to other people whom we think really should be condemned)?
2. What are the implications of saying that sin is a power rather than simply a wrongful act?
3. What do you think it means for Paul to say that, "through the law comes the knowledge of sin?"

## Chapter 3:21-31- “God’s Answer”

In this thrilling section Paul comes to the first of four concluding levels of discourse as he sets out his total argument (the other three will be 5:12-21, 8:28-39 and 11:25-32). Paul here introduces his full understanding of “the righteousness of God” (first stated in 1:17). This righteousness is God’s act of making humanity righteous through faith in Christ alone. “For there is no distinction” (3:22). It is not the Jewish law, nor the search for “glory, honor and immortality,” which the best of the Gentiles desired, that bring us to God. God alone has solved the human dilemma. He comes to us through Christ’s death on the cross.

### IV. The Righteousness of God – 3:21-26

- a. God has revealed his own righteousness “apart from the law.” This was witnessed to “by the law and the prophets” but not fully revealed in them. We are getting here to the heart of the gospel. God does not require us to be righteous since this is now impossible given the reality of our sin (3:10-18). We cannot seek God’s favor through performing the works of the law. Indeed we cannot do them.
- b. Paul will explain that God’s righteousness is God’s own unique way of making us acceptable in his sight. In order for this to be accomplished God must do several things which we are incapable of doing.
  - i. God must forgive our sin without condoning or ignoring it.
  - ii. God must wipe away our sin so that no trace of it is left.
  - iii. God then must make us righteous so that we can be acceptable to him. The only way this is possible is that we are given his righteousness “as a gift” (3:24):

*“For our sake he made him (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” – II Corinthians 5:21*
  - iv. God must destroy “the power of sin” (3:9). Law only increases the power of sin (3:20; 7:5-6).
- c. This righteousness in Christ comes through faith alone “for all who believe.” Who are these? Are they the faithful Israelites (Mark 10:20), the religious Greeks (Acts 17:22) or even the closest followers of Jesus (Matt. 20:20-21)? The answer is none of these, in fact no one, “not even one” (3:10). Paul here has seemingly moved beyond his initial breakdown of Jew and Gentile in chapter 2. He defines here what is really going on in the hearts of those who inherit eternal life. It is nothing ultimately that comes **from** them. Rather it is the righteousness of God which has come **to** them. The sign of this is belief in Christ.
- d. Paul however expands further. “For there is no distinction:”
  - i. All have sinned and fallen short (the same word as in John 2:3, “the wine gave out.”) of the glory of God. Again it is important to remember Paul’s prevailing use of the word, “all.” For Paul “all” signifies no exception.

- ii. Yet this same “all” are now “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). Two further points need to be noted here:
  1. This “now” of necessity includes a “not yet” since we don’t at present see everyone in Christ. The “now” refers to the present power and efficacy of the work of Jesus Christ. Yet we are also here seeing a reference to the “eschatological universalism” of Paul which will be developed throughout the epistle. This universalism is the saving of all who are lost in Adam (I Cor. 15:22). For the time being we have to hold this in tension with Paul’s statements of judgment (2:9-12).
  2. “Redemption” here literally means being set free as in the case of slaves who were given their freedom. “Redeem” includes the idea of buying back something which one had previously lost (Luke 24:21; Gal. 4:5; cf. Luke 15:3-6).
  
- e. God has “put forward” Christ as “a means of atonement.” The word, “atonement” here refers to the “mercy seat” in the tabernacle where God would meet his people (Ex. 25:17-22). The atonement was the great central event in the life of Israel (“Yom Kippur,” “Day of atonement,” Leviticus 16). Jesus is both offered and received as our atonement. This has three meanings:
  1. The atonement is a “sin offering” (Lev. 16:11). The offering pays the price for the sin committed. This is *propitiation*. Christ has become sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). Our sin has been transferred to him and in turn his righteousness has been transferred to us so that we are now justified in God’s sight (3:26).
  2. The atonement washes away our sin as though it never existed (I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 10:22; Rev. 7:14). This is *expiation*. The law that condemned us has been erased (Col. 2:14).
  3. Ultimately, the atonement destroys the power of all the forces that oppose God. For Paul sin, death and even the law are examples of these “powers” (Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8; 6:12; Rom. 5:20; 8:38; cf. John 12:31; 14:30; I John 3:8; Heb. 2:14-15).
  
- f. All this becomes effective through faith which itself is part of God’s gift (Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus’ death covers all sin past, present and future. Therefore God was able to overlook the “sins previously committed” (3:25; Acts 17:30-31). Through faith in Jesus we are justified. This applies to everyone, Jew and Gentile, righteous and unrighteous. There are no exceptions and no distinctions.

## V. Can we have any pride at all? – 3:27-31

- a. There is no basis for boasting (3:27). Paul no doubt here is thinking initially of the Jews with the law. However this applies to all of us. We have done nothing for our salvation. God has done everything. We then have no basis for judging (2:1) or viewing ourselves as in any way superior to any one else (3:9). This is a difficult lesson but an essential one. We are all one with the tax collector who cries, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

- b. When Paul speaks of the “law of faith,” he actually means the “rule or standard of faith” (3:27). Paul refers here to one of his central themes, “justification by faith.” This justification is “apart from works prescribed by the law” (3:28). Paul never denies the importance of works (II Cor. 5:10). Yet our works can never define our position before God. It is important to remember that the act of believing itself is a “work” (in fact belief in God is the first commandment of the law, Ex. 20:3). It is something we do. It is however nothing about which we can ever boast.
- c. Paul reiterates the universal character of God. God is not simply the God of the Jews. He is also the God of the Gentiles (3:29-30). Everything depends on faith alone.
- d. Paul wants to maintain that he is not overturning the law. Rather he is defining the proper role of the law. The law cannot bring us salvation. Much less can it define our relationship to God. The law’s value is that it prepares us for Christ (Gal. 3:21-26). Paul will develop his views on the law further in chapter 4 when he discusses God’s promises to Abraham.

### Question for Us –

1. Why do we have such difficulty accepting the truth that “there is no distinction,” that we are no better than anyone else (“all have sinned”)?
2. What does it mean for us in the daily struggles of life to realize that God has done everything to make us right with him and we then have done and can do nothing?
3. How does this great truth of justification by faith inspire us and motivate us in our Christian life?

## Chapter 4:1-25- “Abraham Believed God”

In this chapter Paul draws on the example of Abraham to show that God has always justified his people by faith (Rom. 3:27). Abraham trusted God, that is the essence of faith, and that was counted to him as righteousness. It was nothing Abraham did, not keeping the law or any commandments, which made him acceptable in God's eyes. Abraham received God's grace, his mercy and love, through a promise not through anything he had done. This was the foreshadowing of the faith that has now come into being through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### I. “What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?” – 4:1-15

- a. Paul now has to explain how his teaching on faith accords with the Old Testament and the history of Israel. Even though he is the apostle to the Gentiles (1:5) he is talking about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the gospel that was “to the Jew first” (1:16). How then does the gospel relate to the faith that begins with Abraham?
- b. Paul is going to introduce a radical new understanding of Abraham that will conflict with the prevailing view of many of his Jewish contemporaries. This view is stated simply in the book, “The Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach (not our Jesus). This book was written in the second century before Christ. According to a hymn in the latter section of the book (Sirach 44:19-21):
  - i. Abraham was the father of Israel because he kept God's Law. He entered into a covenant with God and when tested (the sacrifice of Isaac, Gen. 22) he proved he was faithful.
  - ii. Therefore God made an oath with him that he would be the father of a great people and all nations of the world would be blessed in him.
  - iii. In a book from roughly the same period the statement is made that God has made his promises “through the law” (II Maccabees 2:17-18).

The basic view here then is that Abraham embraced God's law and showed his commitment to that law by being circumcised. When tested, his faith remained firm. Therefore God blessed him. This idea would not have been alien to Paul's Gentile audience who certainly would have identified with his earlier statement that God would repay everyone according to their deeds (Rom. 2:6). Paul's view of justification by faith however has thrown a new and distinctive light on the conventional understanding of these views.

- c. For Paul the view of Abraham found in later Jewish literature does not accord with the Genesis account. Abraham according to Paul was not justified by works. He earned nothing and had no basis for boasting (Paul's continuing concern with his own Pharisee contemporaries, Luke 18:11).
- d. Before Abraham was circumcised, tested or agreed to follow any commandments (the law) he was given a promise by God (Gen. 12:1-3). This promise was that his descendents would be like the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5). Then we read what for Paul is the critical phrase, “And he believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).
- e. Abraham had not earned this. He had performed no work for which this could be considered a reward (4:4-5). He trusted in God's promise. This is what resulted in his righteousness. God received him (“reckoned him”) as though he were

righteous. Paul proceeds to draw the conclusion that our righteousness has nothing to do with our works. He quotes from David in Psalm 32:1-2 (Rom. 4:7-8). The sign of circumcision was a result of the gift of righteousness, not a condition for it (4:11-12). The issue then is not circumcision, much less doing the works of the law. It all comes down to belief which fundamentally is trusting in God's promise.

- f. Paul makes an even bolder statement. He says that God "justifies the ungodly" (4:5). This is a shocking statement on two counts.
  - i. It suggests that Abraham was "ungodly." This conflicts with the exalted view of Abraham found in Jewish writings (Wisdom 44:19) but fits Paul's view of the entire human condition (3:10-18).
  - ii. The prevailing view is that God justifies the righteous, the godly. He will not acquit the guilty (Ex. 23:7; Prov. 17:15; 24:24; Isa. 5:22-23). Yet for Paul this is the righteousness of the law, not the gospel. It is the very nature of the gospel to justify the ungodly (Rom. 5:8; John 3:17; Matt. 9:10-13).
- g. Paul concludes this section with the affirmation that the promise to Abraham did not come through the law (in contradiction to II Maccabees 2:18) but through "the righteousness of faith" (4:13). For Paul the law and the promise of faith are ultimately opposites. If we hold to the law "faith is null and the promise is void" (4:14). Finally, "the law brings wrath" (4:15). It defines sin (3:20). Paul would have included here even the provision of atonement in the law or the Torah itself (Lev. 16). God's wrath must be satisfied for there to be any forgiveness for sin (cf. 1:18 and hence, II Cor. 5: 21).

## **II. The Promise of Grace – 4:16-24**

- a. Paul now brings grace into the discussion of Abraham (3:24). Grace is an essential theme for Paul. Grace is God's underserved favor. Grace can only be expressed as an unconditional promise, never as a reward for anything we've done (Gen. 15:1-5). In the passage of Gen. 15 God himself makes a covenant on behalf of Abraham. God alone is the maker of this covenant (Gen. 15:7-21).
- b. To underscore the radical nature of grace Paul describes God as the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17; Eph. 2:4-5). Paul could not be more explicit that there is no human counterpart to God's promise of righteousness. This is salvation (Matt. 19:26). It is important here that we follow the advice that goes back to Augustine that we are to hope well of all and never rashly regard anyone as cut off from God's grace.
- c. This is made even more explicit when Paul describes Abraham "as good as dead" and Sarah as barren (4:19). The promise of descendents, especially being like the stars in the heavens, is humanly impossible. This is made even more clear in the virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:37).
- d. Abraham's response to God's promise is his faith, his trust in God. This clearly is a result, not a cause of, the promise. Yet the response is critically important. Abraham becomes the father of faith through his faith which is described as "hoping against hope" (4:18). Abraham was convinced "that God was able to do what he had promised" (4:21).
- e. Paul concludes with the great affirmation that Abraham is our model. Just as his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness so the same promise applies to us as

well (4:22-25). We too are made righteous by faith apart from the works prescribed by the law (3:28).

## Question for Us –

1. Why do you think the idea of our winning favor from God is so appealing? What does this say about our view of God and our view of ourselves?
2. Why do you think Paul says that the law brings wrath (4:15)? Can you think of any examples of this in your own life?
3. How does depending on God's promise, apart from any human assurance or guarantee, help us grow strong in our faith (20)?

## Chapter 5- “Much More!”

Romans chapter 5 brings us to the first of several climaxes as Paul expounds his view of Christian faith for his Roman audience. His opening word, “Therefore,” introduces us to the fact that he is going both to summarize and amplify what he has said in the previous chapters. He will expound on the meaning of justification by faith, affirming both the benefits and challenges it sets before us. In the second half of the chapter he will compare and contrast Adam and Christ as representative figures of the human race. Adam brought us sin. Christ brought us grace and salvation. The effects of Christ’s work are “much more” than the effects of sin and death received through Adam. The chapter ends with a powerful and joyful statement of faith affirming the eternal life secured for us in Christ.

- I. Paul begins an extended sentence in 5:1 in which he states that through the justification by faith teaching he outlined in chapters 3-4 we have peace with God. This peace is far more than an absence of conflict or simply a tranquil relationship. Paul’s concept of peace would be the “shalom” of the Old Testament which includes a right relationship to God along with balance and assurance in this life (Lev. 26:3-6; Pss. 29:11; 119:165; Isa. 26:3-4; Micah 2:5-9; Nahum 1:15). Paul adds that this peace leads to the “grace in which we stand” (5:2) and our ability to boast “in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” This is an astonishing statement. The glory of God is nothing less than the revelation of God’s own self (Ps. 8:1; 24:7-10; 96:3-4). Moses could not see God’s glory directly (Ex. 33:18-23). Yet Paul is saying here that we will share the *glory* of God. This is our hope (“hope” here means promise, not wish). Our standing then before God, and indeed before everything else, past, present or future, is guaranteed. Whatever our circumstances we should be the most confident and secure people in the world.
- II. Paul then seems to shift gears dramatically. Having spoken of our special standing in grace (God’s unmerited and undeserved favor), he now speaks of boasting “in our suffering” (5:3). Why in heaven’s name would anyone want to boast of suffering? Paul is referring here to a New Testament idea that we often want to ignore. We are called to participate in Christ’s suffering (II Cor. 1:5). This is the meaning of taking up our cross and following Jesus (Matt. 10:38). Paul goes on to elaborate that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope. This hope is grounded in God’s love and has been “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (5:5). In other words suffering is good for us.

This is a hard teaching. There are times when we may see the development of endurance, character and hope in given situations of suffering. However we also need to remember that Paul is writing here in terms of the ultimate, that is to say, future benefits of faith in Christ. Paul will say later that we are saved in hope but “hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom. 8:24). The sufferings of Job do not appear to have any benefit certainly while Job is enduring them. There are numerous other examples in Scripture, especially the psalmists, who cry out, “Why?” and “How long, O Lord?” (Ps.

- 43:2; 13:1). Even Jesus' suffering on the cross appears to have no tangible benefit especially in his quoting of Ps. 22:1. Yet these are all descriptions of the moment. The question of suffering, and indeed the benefits of suffering, can only be seen from a future perspective. Job can only say, "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:1-2). Later on Paul will affirm that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).
- III. Paul next adds an important statement about the nature of the cross of Christ. It is through the cross that we have been forgiven, reconciled to God and saved. Paul emphasizes that Christ died "for the ungodly" and for "sinners" and "enemies" of God." This is a radical new understanding. In the Old Testament God punishes his enemies (Ps. 68:21; Isa. 1:24). He destroys the ungodly (Ps. 53:5) and the sinners (Isa. 13:9). Here Christ dies for those who are ungodly, sinners and enemies of the Lord. This is the full implication of Jesus' statement that he came not to call the righteous but "sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). But Paul is saying here that even before a sinner repents, "while we were still sinners," "while we were enemies" (5:8, 10) "we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son." Paul acknowledges that someone might be willing to die for a good person (think of Sidney Carton in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*). God however sends his Son to die for his enemies, *not to destroy them but to save them!* This is the heart of Paul's gospel. It is totally and completely life changing. It changes how we view ourselves and how we view others. This is why John Calvin said we should pray that everyone be saved (I Tim. 2:1-4). It is precisely for the enemies of God that Jesus went to the cross. Paul himself was an example (I Tim. 1:12-15).
- No wonder Paul uses the phrase, "much more!" (5:9-10). What God has done is so much more than we could ever do or deserve. Paul keeps his focus on God's coming victory. He speaks in the future tense, "having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life." Reconciliation with God has occurred now, in the present. We can even boast of it (5:11). Nonetheless, for Paul, we will be saved in the future even though we experience the initial stages of our salvation now (Rom. 10:9-10; 11:26; I Cor. 1:18; 3:15; 15:2; Eph. 2:5; Phil. 3:20).
- IV. This leads Paul to a dynamic summary and conclusion. He reflects on his earlier statement that "all have sinned," 5:12; 3:23). He speaks of Adam as "a type of the one who was to come." Adam is being spoken of here as the representative human being ("Adam" in Hebrew means "man." It may also be translated collectively as "men"). Adam, whether viewed as an individual or a type, refers to humanity's sinful condition. Death followed upon this first sin. Paul personifies death here as he does in other epistles ("the last enemy," I Cor. 15:26). He speaks of death exercising dominion or, literally, reigning (5:14). Death then is not simply a state, it is a power. Sin on the other hand remains undefined until the law reveals it (5:13). Sin, death and even the law become these deadly enemies of the human race (I Cor. 15:56).

Paul's joyous conclusion is that Christ's work of saving grace on the cross has accomplished "much more" than sin or death ever could (5:17). It is not enough to say that the grace of Christ overcomes the sin of Adam (which leads to the power of death and the law). It is rather that what Christ has accomplished is so "much more" than what Adam lost. Whatever the effects of Adam's sin, the benefits of Christ's death are so much greater. Paul uses the words "many" and "all" interchangeably in this passage. He includes again the summary word which began the chapter, "therefore."

"Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (5:18).

Paul summarizes this argument later in I Cor. 15:22, "for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." Paul concludes with the exultant statement that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Whatever power sin exercised, the power of grace is "much more." Grace has the greater dominion "leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:21).

Does Paul really mean that "those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" are really "all," the same all who have sinned and been condemned by the law? In reality this is what he says. How does this relate to other themes such as the Last Judgment and to the warnings of hell (Matt. 5:30)? We can't answer all these questions. Paul is describing a future reality that we cannot comprehend (8:19-21). Paul's view has been described as "eschatological universalism." This is to say that at some future point all will be saved. Will this be after some have already been lost in the judgment? When Paul says the last enemy to be destroyed is death (I Cor. 15:26), does he mean only the first death or is he including the second death (Rev. 20:14)?

We cannot speculate on all these questions. It is sufficient to say that Rom. 5 presents an incredibly hopeful affirmation. There is no more joyful passage in all of scripture.

## Questions for Us –

1. If Christ died for us when we were God's enemies (5:10), how should we treat those who appear to be enemies of the gospel today? How should we treat our own enemies?
2. Can you think of types in your life when suffering has taught you a lesson? What can we say to people who are going through times of suffering?
3. What are the implications of saying that the free gift of God's grace in Christ is "much more" than the consequences of sin and death? How does this help us witness to the gospel?

## Chapter 6- "Why Worry About Sin?"

After Paul's powerful summary of God's abundant grace in chapter 5 he now addresses a familiar misunderstanding of the gospel. If salvation and life in Christ is all of grace does what we do even matter? To be strictly logical, since grace abounds where sin increases it really ought to be to our benefit to sin. Such thinking however misses the entire point. The purpose of grace is to unite us with Christ. We presently live in the tension between death and resurrection. Grace gives us the power not to sin. To ignore this is to return to the slavery of sin where death reigns (5:12-14). God's free gift calls us to hand ourselves over to Christ so that his new life becomes our life.

- I. For Paul to continue in sin is to lose all the benefit of God's grace. Paul's whole view is that sin is a form of slavery since for him sin and death are ultimately cosmic powers that rule humanity. Sin is a power that serves the ultimate powers of death and Satan. These are the powers that Christ conquered on the cross (Col. 2:15). Grace exercises control over us now instead of sin. Part of the confusion that Paul is clearing up is that law is not part of grace but rather law has become an instrument of sin and death (5:20-21; I Cor. 15:56-57).

There are a number of dangers to be avoided here. Initially there is the mistaken view that the law can somehow lead to righteousness, to being favored by God and led into a right relationship with him. This is the issue Paul discussed in chapter 2. The problem with dependence on the law is that it leads either to despair (because we can't really keep it, Luke 5:8) or spiritual pride (because we think we can and we then proceed to judge others, Luke 18:11). It misses the critical point that righteousness is neither a human goal nor possibility but rather that righteousness is a gift from God (3:21-26).

The second fallacy which Paul focuses on in this chapter is that since all is of grace and God does everything while we, in effect, do nothing, it doesn't matter how we live. It doesn't even matter that we sin since God will always forgive us. This confusion has always arisen wherever Paul's radical view of the gospel of grace is clearly presented (Acts 21:17-28). The problem here is a faulty understanding of the death of Christ. Jesus did not die simply so that our sins could be forgiven. While this is certainly true, Christ's death symbolizes his victory over the power of sin, death and Satan (Heb. 2:14-15; I John 3:8). To view Christ's death solely as a means of forgiveness is severely to restrict the gospel. The gospel of grace is a source of power. To ignore that power is to choose slavery over freedom.

- II. Paul therefore asks the question, "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" (6:2). Paul reminds us of the reality of our baptism. Baptism unites us to Christ. Baptism symbolizes the fact that we now share in Christ's death and resurrection.

- III. We do not share in these fully in this life. Paul's perspective remains eschatological, that is, he looks at the present in the light of the future fulfillment of our salvation, "we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (6:5; I Cor. 15:42-49). This union with Christ has powerful implications for Paul. He states that "our old self" was crucified with Christ "so that the body of sin might be destroyed" (6:6). On the other hand we share in the "glory of the Father" so that we can walk in newness of life. Glory has the idea of the demonstrated presence of something special, in this case, the reality of God the Father (Rom. 2:7, 10; 3:23; 5:2; I Cor. 2:7; Phil. 3:21).
- IV. To understand where Paul is heading we must see that for him grace is not an abstract concept. It is more than a gift or even a promise. The whole point at issue is that grace is ultimately a way of being drawn into Christ. The goal of salvation even in this life is not forgiveness of sin, freedom from the law or eternal life as important as those are. The ultimate goal is to be united with Christ (6:5; Gal. 2:20). True life for Paul is life *with* Christ and *in* Christ. Baptism is important because the water there symbolizes the Spirit which initiates our life in Christ (5:5; I Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 3:5). In this life in Christ we are admonished to live as those who have been brought "from death to life" (6:13). As those who share in Christ's resurrection we should serve God the Father because this is exactly what the Risen Christ does (John 20:17).
- V. This is then why sin is such a contradiction to this new life in Christ. Sin as a power is a lord. It exercises dominion (6:12). We can serve sin or we can serve God but we obviously can't serve both (6:13). For Paul the great paradox is that the law leads to sin's domination (5:12-14). The freedom we receive in grace carries with it the abiding presence of Christ in our lives. This is our glory (Col. 1:27). Now take a deep breath. In this grace we do in fact have the freedom to sin (14:14; Gal. 5: 13; I Cor. 9:1; 10:29). Grace will always overpower sin. In grace the deadly power of sin has more than met its match. Even if we give into sin we cannot contradict the power of grace since grace does not come *from* us. It only comes *to* us. It is God's gift (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace will always have dominion over sin (5:20-21).
- VI. Paul now asks, "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (6:15). The question is inevitable. Paul will not back down on the three essential elements of his understanding of the Christian life:
- a. Christ overcame sin, death and Satan on the cross (Eph. 4:8-10). This is our righteousness and justification effective through faith (3:23-26). Faith is the result of the free gift of grace (5:15; Eph. 2:8). It is not our work (4:4-5).
  - b. Christ has set us free from the law and sin (10:4; Gal. 5:1)
  - c. We are united to Christ through our baptism (6:3-4). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (8:38-39).

Given these essential truths it is in fact *conceptually and logically* possible to repeat the question of 6:1. Paul however has only one answer: "By no means!"

Paul wants to affirm that sin is a form of slavery. To sin is to be in bondage, captivity. This captivity is only strengthened by the law whose primary function is to identify sin in all its perversion (3:20). Christ has set us free from the power of sin. We are no longer sin's slaves (6:16-18). This does not mean that we are totally free

from sin (I John 1:8). Paul will return to this question in the next chapter. It does mean that sin no longer has dominion over us. It does not have the power to make us continually disobey God. It is in this sense that we can say that the Christian does not sin (I John 3:9). When we do fall into sin we seek God's forgiveness already assured us in Christ (I John 1:9).

Paul affirms ultimately that sin is a form of death while God's free gift in Christ is eternal life (6:23). We cannot both be under the control of sin and the control of Christ (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). Freedom in Christ is at the same time captivity to Christ. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price (I Cor. 6:19-20). Therefore we are called to present ourselves "as slaves to righteousness for sanctification" (6:19).

## Questions for us –

- a. Why do you think Paul's view of grace has so often been misunderstood? How has this view been distorted by the legalism (emphasis on the law) so often found among Christians?
- b. Romans 5 speaks of sin as a power. In chapter 6 Paul speaks of being a slave to sin. What does it mean to say that sin is an enslaving power? How do we understand the idea of Christ's victory over these powers in the cross?
- c. What does it mean for us to present the members of our body "as slaves to righteousness for sanctification?"

## Chapter 7- "The War Inside Us"

Paul in this chapter adds an additional reflection to his understanding of life in God's abundant grace (Rom. 5:20). He deals here with the question of the role of the law. His likening the law to a woman bound to her husband only during the husband's life time indicates his view that the role of the law in God's plan of salvation is now over (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 5:1-4; Eph. 2:15; Phil. 3:7-9; Col. 2:13-14). When we look to the law all we see is our own sin. This is not because the law is sinful. Rather we are the sinners. Whenever we try to follow the law we fail because our sinful nature is still with us (salvation for Paul is a process that extends into the future for its final fulfillment (5:9-10; 10:9; 13:11; I Cor. 1:18; 3:15; I Tim. 4:16)). In this life our flesh remains captive to sin and resistant to God's law (Gal. 5:17). Our sinful flesh can only become weaker. It never becomes better.

- I. For Paul the issue of the law remains as a question that must be addressed. Paul as a Pharisee was trained under the law (the "Torah," literally the teaching) (Phil. 3:5). The Torah primarily was the five books of Moses but it also extended to all the Old Testament which could be referred to as the "law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). What then is the role of the law for the Christian, especially the Gentile Christian who did not grow up under it?
- II. This is a major question since one of the objections to Christians and the church in general is that we are "legalistic." This usually means inflexible, rigid and judgmental. Yet the odd thing is that the law itself cannot be described as rigid and judgmental. This is also an area where certain combinations of Pharisaism and Greek cultural standards have penetrated the church. It is important to remember that despite Jesus' frequent conflicts with the Pharisees (Matt. 23), they were close to his teaching in many ways and a number of them became early converts to Christianity (Acts 15:5). The Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18) had some similarities to Christian ethics but their strong emphasis on duty could be perceived as rigid. Paul faced both these tendencies in the early church and their views were the occasion, in Luke's words, of "no small dissension and debate" (Acts 15:2).
- III. All this is to say that in Romans chapter 7 Paul is trying to give an account of the law in the Christian life. Paul's basic view seems to be twofold. On the first side the law he argues had only a temporary role in God's plan of salvation. As he says in Galatians the law was our tutor ("disciplinarian") to bring us to Christ. Once that was accomplished we no longer need the law (Gal. 3:23-29). Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4). Secondly, for Paul the gospel message of love sums up the law itself so that its requirements are ultimately met by the attitude and nature of love which cannot be reduced to a written code of instructions (Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14). Jesus says something very similar (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus certainly does not hold rigidly to the law's commandments (Matt. 12:1-8; John 8:1-11). Therefore Paul seems to be saying that the law has no authority over the Christian (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14).

- IV. Paul uses a creative analogy from marriage. A woman is only bound to her husband while he is alive (7:1-2). When he dies she is free and can remarry (7:3). In the same way, Paul argues, Christians have died to the law so they can share the new life in Christ (7:4). While we were living “in the flesh,” that is, in our own power, our sinful passions were in fact “aroused by the law” (7:5). This brought us under the wages of sin bringing death (6:23). In Christ however we have been freed from the law so that we can live under the “new life of the Spirit.” We are bound to Christ, slaves in a sense to him under the Holy Spirit as Paul said in chapter 6 (6:17-18). Yet this slavery is our ultimate freedom (Gal. 5:1). This is why using our freedom to sin is a complete contradiction. To sin is to go back to our earlier slavery where we had no freedom (6:7-8).
- V. Paul is now going to advance his argument further. He wants to make it clear that the law is no help in avoiding sin. The law does not contribute to our freedom in Christ. Once it has brought us to Christ its work is over (Gal. 3:25). Everyone has to go to high school. The time comes however to graduate and then you can’t go back to school. Paul will now explain why the law is ineffective in the Christian life:
- a. The law is good in itself. However its function in God’s plan of salvation is not to make us righteous (that only comes through grace). Its role is to make us aware of our sin. The law in fact increases our sin. When the law tells us not to covet or desire what others have it only makes us more desirous (7:7-8).
  - b. The law is “holy and just and good” (7:12). However in the presence of sin (which Paul regards as a power that exercises dominion, 5:21) the law becomes deadly.
  - c. Paul does not say that the law is deadly in and of itself. However sin takes the law and turns it to its own advantage, that is, sin uses the law to increase our desire for sin. In the hands of sin the law becomes an instrument of death (I Cor. 15:56). How is this possible? The law reveals sin. It exposes the sin in us but does nothing to curtail its power. Sin, once exposed, seeks to establish its power more and more. In Paul’s graphic illustration, the commandment not to covet made him all the more covetous (7:7-10). It is the very nature of our sinfulness to want to do whatever the law forbids us to do (“whatever you do, don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”).
- VI. To turn to the law is only to discover the depths of our sin. It is when we look at the commandments that we see how far we are from fulfilling them. As a follower of Christ I want to do God’s will. I want to follow the law. Yet for the present sin is still with me. In my flesh, that is, my natural sinful self, “I know that nothing good dwells within me” (7:18). When I try to follow the law, even the law as Jesus interprets it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (7:19).
- VII. Paul goes on to describe a war that is taking place within him and, by extension, within all believers (Gal.5:17). As a Christian (and this would not apply to non-

Christians) “I delight in the law of God in my inmost self” (7:22). Yet the law of sin remains in me and counteracts God’s law (7:23). Paul cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24).

- VIII. It is important to recognize the dilemma that Paul is describing and to relate it to other parts of Scripture. David, for example, delights in the law of God (Ps. 119). Jesus maintains that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Paul would say that David’s reflections are those of one being tutored by the law. The law is holy and just and good (7:12). At a certain point we rejoice in the law because it presents us with truth in the midst of the chaos and self destructive practices of the world. Yet Paul in effect is saying this only goes so far. With regard to the Sermon on the Mount Paul would say this is life in Christ. In our flesh all of this is impossible. At the most we can only go through the motions (Luke 18:11). This is what he had done in his previous life as a Pharisee. Paul is saying that the Christian cannot live in terms of the law. This is not because of any defect in the law but rather because sin still resides in our flesh and will do so until we are in our resurrection body (I Cor. 15:42-45), The more we seek to follow the law the more we will discover the power of sin that still resides in us. In this context we can only see ourselves as “wretched.”
- IX. Our only hope is “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:25). There are several reasons for this:

- a. Christ forgives all our sin (Eph. 1:7).
- b. He breaks the power of sin over us (6:6; Col. 2:13-15)

Therefore in Christ alone we can experience the freedom from the law and the freedom from sin. Yet Paul leaves us with a sober reminder. In our flesh we remain a slave to the law of sin (7:25). It is only as we are led by the Holy Spirit that we can live out the love which is the fulfillment of the law. This is Paul’s focus in chapter 8.

## Questions for Discussion –

1. John Calvin spoke of a “third use” of the law that could benefit Christians. He argued that the law remains a model for us even though we are no longer under its authority. Do you think Paul would accept this idea?
2. Why do you think so many Christians want to hold onto the law in some form (as the Christian Pharisees did in Acts 15)?
3. How would you interpret Paul’s statement that nothing good dwells in our flesh? What do you think he means by “flesh?”

## Chapter 8:1-17 - “More Than Conquerors” - Part 1

Paul now turns away from the inner conflict the Christian faces with the law, sin and death to the solid basis of the Christian life. Basically Paul here is amplifying his first major concluding statement in 5:12-21. On one side of the human situation was Adam, helpless under sin, law and death. On the other side was Christ, whose death brought forgiveness and life and whose effect was “much more” than what lay under Adam’s heritage (5:15-17). Following this monumental assertion with the implication of an “eschatological universalism” (5:18-21), Paul spent the next two chapters dealing first with the continuing possibility of sin (“Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?” 6:1) and second, with the law’s inability to do anything to correct the problem of sin (chapter 7). After dealing with those questions he now returns to the main subject of his argument, life in Christ. What does it mean to live in terms of the grace of Christ as opposed to living under the power of sin, death and the law in Adam? Paul begins to build toward his second conclusion.

- I. Paul begins with a central affirmation that can never be compromised: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (8:1). Early Christian scribes apparently felt that this was too bold an affirmation. Therefore they added, “who walk not according to the flesh,” and also “but walk according to the Spirit” (cf. King James translation 1611). But this compromises the pure confidence of the gospel that Paul has been outlining throughout this epistle. This basic affirmation is essential both for what has gone before (the only hope of the “wretched man” of 7:24) and what will come next.
- II. Paul reaffirms the central point that the law with its inevitable corollary of “sin and death” no longer controls the Christian. We have been set free from its demands and its condemnation (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:13-14). Yet Paul speaks here of the “law of the Spirit of life” (8:2). What is this? Paul seems to be referring to “law” in a general sense, not in the specific sense of the Torah, the Old Testament law. He is setting this law of the Spirit of life over against the former, the law of sin and death. Paul then is speaking of the Spirit of life (in the sense of the Holy Spirit) as a rule, a standard, indeed a new authority for Christians which now replaces the law of sin and death. The Mosaic law of the Old Testament has played its role. This law was and is, “holy and just and good” (7:12). The law as our “tutor” (Gal. 3:24) played (*past tense*) an important role. The law accomplished the following purposes:
  - a) It defined the will of God and sets the standard for human conduct Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12
  - b) It defined sin – Rom. 3:20; 7:7
  - c) Its goal was to lead us to Christ – Gal. 3:19; Rom. 10:4

III. The great truth, Paul continually reminds us, is that God himself has fulfilled the law (something we could never do) by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross. Several things are crucial here:

- a) Christ was born “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3). Jesus was not a second Adam in the sense of an original creation. Adam and Eve’s flesh, or humanity, was not inherently sinful. It became sinful once they had disobeyed God. Jesus, with the humanity of Mary’s lineage, is born with a predisposition to sin. Yet Jesus never succumbs to this (Heb. 4:15).
- b) Jesus in his death as a perfect sin offering condemned sin in his own flesh by taking upon himself the full consequences of all its guilt (8:3).
- c) Jesus therefore has fulfilled “the just requirement of the law” on our behalf. The law can demand nothing more of us.

We experience the full benefit of this as we walk in the Holy Spirit. For Paul the Spirit grafts us onto Christ (Rom. 5:1-5; II Cor. 1:21-22) so that in fact Christ lives in us and we live in him (Gal. 2:20).

IV. There is a warning here. We are not to walk according to the flesh, setting our minds on the things that come from it. Our flesh for Paul, is our sinful self. It is the opposite of life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Living in the flesh is far more than committing sins in our flesh. It is returning to the dead end of chapter 7. It relates to our effort to please God, to follow him to obey his commandments. Conventional wisdom would want to say that this is what we should do but for Paul this is to fall back into the thinking of the law (“Do this and you shall live,” Lev. 18:5). Our flesh is the center of our pride, our ego. In the flesh we can will to do what is right but we don’t have the power to carry it out (Rom. 7:18). Setting our minds on the flesh can only lead to death since the law continually rises up against our flesh to condemn us (“The person who sins shall die,” Ezekiel 18:20). All the efforts and effects of the flesh are “hostile to God” (8:7). The law plays a continuing role for us in that whenever we are tempted to follow our flesh, to live in our own strength, to focus on ourselves, it rises up before us identifying our sin whatever that may be. More often than not it is the sin of pride (Lev. 26:14-20).

V. Paul assures us that we are not “in the flesh.” We can no longer be defined by our sinful humanity with all its desires and illusions. Paul tells us that we are in the Spirit because through faith Christ is in us. Our bodies (a more limited idea than flesh) remain spiritually dead since sin still dwells within them. Paul here is defining the tension in the life of the believer. Our mortal bodies will respond to sin throughout this life. Yet the Holy spirit given to us on account of Christ’s righteousness brings us new life (8:10-11).

VI. The critical difference between the situation Paul describes in chapter 7 and the one here in chapter 8 is the reality of the Holy Spirit in the lives of

believers. Paul appears to be radical enough to say that the law really plays no positive role in the life of the believer. The law just keeps bringing us back to the Romans 7 dead end. The entire Christian life for Paul is led in the Spirit: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (v. 14)."

- VII. This raises an important question. Is there a need for regulations in the Christian life? Obviously a Christian community (the church) needs some structure and definition. But at the individual level do Christians need some kind of rule that defines what a Christian does or does not do? By the second century, within a century after Paul's death, such rule books were beginning to appear. Throughout history most theologians have turned to at least the Ten Commandments for such a standard. In reality this is not Paul's position. As he will say later, all of the law is summed up in the statement that we should love one another (Rom. 13:8-10). In Christian history only Augustine and Luther have really come close to this position (Augustine said at one point, "love God and do as you please"). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, looking back on his great book *The Cost of Discipleship*, acknowledged potential problems in it. Presumably he was referring to the danger of legalism. John Calvin saw the value of the law as a prod or model for Christians. However within a century of his death many of his descendents, such as the Puritans, had fallen into the trap of legalism.
- VIII. The technical name for what appears to be Paul's position is *antinomism* ("nomism" refers to the law so antinomism is literally "against the law"). This position has been the subject of major debate in Lutheran and Reformed circles. Certainly in its more extreme form, that a Christian can do anything she wants, it was already circulating in the New Testament period (cf. 3:8; 6:1; 14:14; I Cor. 10:23; Acts 21:27-28). These issues are very much with us to this day and underlie much of the debate over homosexuality in the contemporary church.
- IX. Paul insists that if we really follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, which he believes all Christians have (I Cor. 12:3), we will not be dominated by the "deeds of the body." For Paul "flesh" is synonymous with sinful life. To live according to the flesh is death (8:13). What Paul seems to be saying is that if we define ourselves by "the deeds of the body" we are placing ourselves under slavery and eventually death. We do not need the Law to tell us that our earthly desires can overpower us and destroy us. Paul does not believe that the world and our desires for the things of the world are inherently sinful (I Tim. 4:4). Yet Paul knows our sinful selves. If we become debtors to the flesh (focusing on the flesh) our flesh will destroy us. We have received a spirit of adoption through what Christ had done for us. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (8:17). To follow the Spirit is to follow the pattern of Christ. In Christ we have same intimacy with the Father that Christ had ("Abba" literally means "Daddy" 8:15).

- X. Jesus himself shows us the true meaning of freedom in the Spirit. He turns water into wine (John 2:1-11). He enjoys eating and drinking (Matt. 11:19). He plucks grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8). He eats with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15). He accepts women of dubious reputations and even allows them to touch him (Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11). Most importantly he loves everyone even those who are not willing to follow him (Mark 10:21-22).
- XI. For Paul the leading of the Holy Spirit is incompatible with a life lived in the “flesh,” the focus of sinful desires. This doesn’t mean that he believes Christians don’t sin. However they are not enslaved to sin (6:6). When Paul warns that leading a life “according to the flesh” will lead to death he is acknowledging a tension. Christ has brought “justification and life for all” (5:18). This is especially the case of those who confess and believe in him (1 Tim. 4:10). Yet to give oneself over to the flesh is to contradict this essential truth (Gal. 5:19-21). Some may ask, is Paul saying that a Christian can lose his salvation? Yet this is not a question that fits Paul’s thought. Salvation is never a possession of ours. It is always a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). We can never despise that gift. It is also important to remember that for Paul grace always has the last word (5:20-21).
- XII. The irony of Christian history is that a failure to follow Paul’s teaching has led at times to a legalism that goes beyond anything in the Old Testament. For example, Christian observance of the Lord’s Day often has been more strict than anything in the Torah, forbidding not only work but almost any form of pleasure. The requirements regarding divorce were more liberal in the Torah than in later church law (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus does not reject the Torah’s view. He points out that it falls short of God’s original intention and was given because of Israel’s “hardness of heart” (Matt. 19:8).
- In a related issue the church’s view on sex and marriage was hampered by an overdependence on Greek philosophy and even mythology. Later church teaching, including Augustine, took the view (from Plato not the Old Testament) that sex was inherently sinful. Therefore the erotic sections of the Old Testament were either reinterpreted or overlooked. In particular the texts celebrating the beauty of the female body were almost entirely ignored (Prov. 5:18-19; Song of Solomon 7:6-9; Ezek. 16:6-8). Paul’s warning about the “law of sin and death” was often not taken seriously enough.
- XIII. Paul’s final statement in this section is to remind us that suffering with Christ is necessary to our sharing in his glory (Matt. 10:38; II Cor. 1:5).

## Questions for us –

1. Why do you think it is so important that Christ came into the world “in the likeness of sinful flesh?”
2. Why do you think that Christians so many times have chosen to try to live by the law rather than the Spirit?

3. What are some of the ways that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God?

## Chapter 8:18-30: “More Than Conquerors” – Part 2

At the end of verse 17 Paul raises the issue of suffering. In presenting the hopeful conclusion of chapter 8 (beginning with the great affirmation of “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” v. 1) he must now address the question of suffering. If we are free from condemnation and living life in the Spirit (v.9) why do we have to face suffering? In the words of James D.G. Dunn, “The assurance that he (Paul) offers his readers here then is that the experience of human contradiction in which they share as believers is no cause for despair.” God is in charge even to the point where suffering itself has a purpose in God’s redemption not only of humanity (those “in Adam,” 5:14), but of all creation. Paul reminds us that “hope that is seen is not hope” (8:24). All things are not good but God is working “all things together for good” (8:28).

- I. Having introduced the theme of suffering Paul makes the statement that the “sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (8:18). Paul has no illusions that life in Christ will somehow spare people from suffering. In fact following Christ may increase our suffering (II Cor. 1:5). Jesus challenges us to take up our cross and follow him (Matt. 10:38). Following Christ will lead inevitably to some kind of persecution even if it is the war inside us between flesh and Spirit (II Tim. 3:12; Gal. 5:17).

Paul never says that suffering is good. There is no inherent benefit in suffering. Yet suffering is necessary for a greater good. Paul’s eschatological (future oriented) view of salvation focuses on much more than individuals (Col. 1:20). Paul speaks of creation itself being set free from decay to share in the glory of God promised to believers (8:19-21). Several themes need to be identified here. First, the glory of God has been mentioned several times throughout Romans up to this point (cf. 1:23; 2:10; 3:7, 23; 4:20; 5:2; 6:4). God’s glory is the revealing of his true self, the essence of who God is. Paul believes that we will share in God’s glory (8:17). That is to say, in a way we can not truly comprehend in this life, we will share with God in Christ in his eternal being and work (8:30; Col. 1:27; II Thess. 1:11-12). Paul is describing the presence of God as the goal of human life (Ps. 42:1; in the words of the catechism “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever”). Second, creation itself is part of the brokenness and sin which infects humanity (5:12-14). For Paul the entire creation is tied up with the salvation of “the children of God” (8:19). Paul likens the situation of the creation as well as that of ourselves to “groaning in labor pains” (8:22; an interesting image in his male dominated culture). We have only “the first fruits of the Spirit” (8:23). Our salvation is not complete in this life. We “groan inwardly, while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23).

Paul is saying that suffering serves a purpose just as labor pains serve the purpose of new birth. This is a daring statement given the depths of the “groaning” to which we are susceptible. At the heart of the problem of suffering is the desperate cry from the cross, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; Ps. 22:1). For Paul the Christian is saved by hope (8:24). However he quickly adds, “Now hope that is seen is not hope” (8:24). We cannot answer the question of suffering, especially the specific question of why *this suffering* for

*this person at this time* (the whole dilemma of Job's comforters, Job 2: 11-13). We are groaning for all kinds of reasons. However we do not see the new life, the redemption that comes out of that suffering, any more than someone witnessing the crucifixion saw in the dying Jesus any evidence of a resurrection to eternal life. Paul believes that living in unseen hope teaches us patience (8:25; 5:3-5). This is a tough lesson. Really tough.

- II. Paul understands how difficult this is. He knew what it was to be on the brink of despair in his ministry (II Cor. 1:8). He experienced suffering, opposition and weakness (Acts 20:19; II Cor. 11:24-30; II Tim. 4:14). He now introduces a new topic which, nonetheless, flows from the theme of suffering. This is the theme of prayer. In suffering we go to prayer. Yet an ultimate expression of our weakness is that we do not even know how to pray as we ought (8:26). In the depths of suffering and despair it may seem impossible even to pray. Paul here assures us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us "with sighs too deep for words" (8:26). God the Father responds to the pleading of the Spirit on our behalf (8:27). This means that even when we can't pray God the Spirit prays for us and God the Father hears. Christ also prays for us (Luke 22:31-32).

Paul has placed us in a seemingly unbearable tension between the suffering of the present and the hope of future glory. Can we live with unseen hope? Is this sufficient for the parent who's lost a child, or the person who's lost a spouse? What about someone who's just been told they have a serious illness or lost their job? Is this enough? Who can live with hope that "we do not see" (8:24)? Paul is no stranger to suffering. He answers these questions with the most defiant expression of hope in the whole Bible.

- III. Paul makes this great affirmation, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (8:28). Several things must be noted here:

- a. Paul says "we know," not we hope, we think or we wish. At this point he is emphatically definite.
- b. "all things" – When Paul uses the word "all" he admits of no exception ("all of you," 1:8, "all ungodliness and wickedness," 1:18; "God through Jesus Christ will judge the secret thoughts of all," 2:16; "all have sinned," 3:23; Abraham is the father of all of us, 4:16; "death spread to all because all have sinned," 5:12).
- c. Paul never says all things are good but that God will work all things together for good
- d. This is assured in God for all who love him, all who are called according to his purpose. The two go together. In our sinful nature we can never love God until we have been called by him (John 6:44; Eph. 2:4-5; II Thess. 2:13-14).

Paul now rises to the level of a great hymn writer in his closing affirmation. Here is the order:

- a. God foreknew us. This means that he had us in mind before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The idea here is pre-planned not simply knowledge of the future. There could of course be no future outside of God. God plans the events of history (Eph. 1:11).
- b. We have been predestined. This is based solely on God's grace and mercy and nothing in us (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:5; II Tim. 1:9).
- c. The goal of our predestination is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. This cannot take place without our sharing in his suffering (8:17).
- d. Having been predestined we have been called by God (Gal. 1:15-16).
- e. Having been called we have been justified (3:21-24; 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9). We face *no condemnation* (8:1).
- f. The final goal of this is that we will be glorified. In ways that are beyond our imagining we will experience God in God's presence (I Cor. 2:7-9; 13:12; Phil. 4:19)

## Questions for Discussion –

1. How does what Paul says here help us as we deal with the issue of suffering in our life and in the lives of others? How can we apply Paul's definition of hope to these situations?
2. What do you think Paul means when he says that we do not know how to pray as we ought but that the Spirit intercedes for us "with sighs too deep for words" (8:26)? What encouragement does this give us in our prayer life?
3. What hope and confidence can we take from the assertion that in Christ we will be glorified (8:30; Col. 1:27)?

## The Victory of God – Chapter 8:31-39

### “More Than Conquerors” – Part 3

Paul brings the eighth chapter of Romans to a thundering conclusion. Having addressed questions about the Christian life, the role of the law and the indwelling place of the Holy Spirit he now returns to the central theme of the righteousness of God which was introduced in chapter 3:21-26 and then elaborated upon in his Adam and Christ discussion of 5:12-21. Paul now here addresses the deepest questions of the Old Testament as well as the Greek and Roman world, questions which recur to this day in all cultures, all historical periods and indeed all human experience. Paul begins his summary with the questions, “What then are we to say about these things?” (8:31). “These things” are nothing less than all he has discussed up to this point. Paul quotes from the tragic Psalm 44 to affirm his unshakeable confidence in the fact that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

- I. Having dealt with the question of suffering (8:18-30) Paul is ready for his second concluding statement (the first having occurred in 5:12-21). Paul returns to his central theme. The righteousness of God is the faithfulness of God. In spite of the sin of Adam God abandons neither humanity nor the world. His reference to “these things” (8:31) recalls the recent questions of suffering (8:22-23), the unseen hope that guides us (8:24), the weakness of our prayers (8:26) as well as the former issues of misusing grace (chapter 6) and trying to live according to the law (chapter 7). With all that is incomplete and uncertain about our faith (“Now hope that is seen is not hope,” v. 24), Paul presents the rhetorical question, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (v. 31). The whole gospel message is that God indeed is for us (“while we still were sinners Christ died for us,” 5:8).

To demonstrate this truth Paul; appeals to the basic example of Christ himself. God gave his own Son for “all of us,” Paul uses the precise language of the reality of sin he discussed in chapter one. There in response to human sin God gave humanity up. What Paul was describing in that chapter was the terrible judgment of abandonment. The worst thing that can happen to a human being is to be without God (Ps. 42:9-10). All the language of judgment, “the worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched” (Isa. 66:24), the outer darkness (Matt. 8:12), the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15) are symbolic expressions of the despair and hopelessness of life apart from God. Paul is saying that God gave Jesus up to this same judgment in sending him to the cross to benefit his enemies, all of us in our sin (5:10). Christ on the cross quotes the twenty second psalm. This psalm is a description of the torments of the hell that results from being forsaken by God, “scorned and despised” (Ps. 22:6), attacked by wild beasts (Ps. 22:12-13), surrounded by “dogs”, blood licking beasts (I Kings 21:17-24), left in the dust of death (Ps. 22:15), gloated over by a “company of evildoers” (demons?) (Ps. 22:16). This psalm describes in vivid detail the crucifixion in which Christ himself is in hell (“he descended into hell”). Christ following his physical death descends into Hades, the place of the dead (I Peter 3:18-20).

However on the cross, experiencing the reality of Ps. 22, he is in hell (Mark 15:33-34).

Yet Psalm 22 does not end in hopelessness. It concludes with a great affirmation of faith and confidence in the Lord (Ps. 22:22-31). Paul is saying that God gave Christ up to the full reality of abandonment and judgment on the cross so that we may be delivered and saved. Paul then adds, if God was willing to do that for us, will he not give us everything else that we could possibly need?

- I. We have been completely set free from guilt and sin. This is Paul's great conclusion. We are free from the power of sin, from the law and from everything that can tear us down as human beings (8:1). Who could possibly accuse us, Paul asks rhetorically. We are justified by God (8:33). This is the whole meaning of the righteousness of God, the righteousness which God gives to undeserving sinners (3:21-25; 5:1-11). Paul adds, "Who is to condemn?" (8:34). Christ Jesus is the one to whom we have to answer. He is the judge of all, the living and the dead (II Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:26-29; Rev. 1:17). Yet he is the one who is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25). Paul's affirmation stands firm. Everything necessary for our salvation, indeed our freedom, has been accomplished by Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:1). We add nothing to it either by good works or works of the law (3:27-28; 4:1-6; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). Paul then has interpreted the general references in chapter 2 to "doing good" (2:6-11) in terms of the "good news" of the gospel (1:1-6).
- II. Paul now asks one of the most important questions in all of Scripture: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (8:35). He adds a possible list.
  - a. The first thing he mentions is "hardship." This can take many forms. Life is full of difficulties and uncertainties.
  - b. He adds "distress." This is a huge category in Scripture. It includes the effect of worshipping false gods (Deut. 4:27-31; Judges 2:14-15), grief and sorrow (Ps. 31:9-10), rebellion and sin (Ps. 107:10-19). God himself will bring distress upon the world for its sin (Zephaniah 1:17-18). Paul does not hesitate to talk about the distress which results from living in the flesh and rebelling against the gospel (Gal. 5:19-21; II Thess. 5:1-12). It is significant that "distress" is a condition of both God's chosen people and the world in general. David is in distress as a result of his sin (II Sam. 16:11-12; 24:14). God also will bring distress upon the nations (Luke 21:25-26).
  - c. Paul next adds to the list, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and the sword. These things summarize two key figures in the Book of Revelation, the four horsemen and the great whore (Rev. 6:1-8; 17:1-6). Paul then quotes from one of the most despairing of all the psalms, Ps. 44. This psalm is a lament of the people of Israel who, in the context of the psalm, have not been faithless. Indeed the writer protests, "Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way" (Ps. 44:17). Yet they have experienced abandonment by God. More to the point, they have been made the objects of derision, scorn, shame and abuse. They have ended up in "deep darkness" (Ps. 44:13-19). There is no explanation for their suffering. The psalmist concludes with the words, quoted by Paul,

“Because of you we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps. 44:22; Rom. 8:36).

- d. Yet faced with all this despair, struggle and indeed darkness Paul makes the stirring affirmation, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (8:37). Paul doesn’t answer the questions of Psalm 44. He overrides them with the claim that in Christ we are “more than conquerors” over all these things. He doesn’t explain how this is true. He insists that it is. “All” here as it has been used throughout the epistle can admit of no exceptions or else Paul’s confidence is hopelessly compromised (cf. Rom. 3:12; 3:23; 5:18; 8:28, 32). The outworking of this truth is ultimately in the eschatology of the future beyond the point where “hope that is seen is not” (8:24).
- e. Paul concludes with what may well be his greatest affirmation of faith. He is convinced that we can never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus by “neither death nor life” We think of death being a separation but life itself is full of temptations and struggle that would seem to be able to move us away from God (Mark 4:13-19). Angels (faithful or fallen, Jude 1:6) cannot separate us. Paul then refers to “rulers,” originally the first powers, perhaps the “sons of God” who fell into corruption (Gen. 6:1-4; Ps. 82). Using the same word Jesus refers to Satan as having been a murderer “from the first” or “from the beginning” (John 8:44; I John 3:8). Paul adds neither “things present nor things to come.” This means nothing less than everything in the present world and anything in the future. This has to include family, friends, jobs, school, politics, physical locations, food, drink, sports, movies, video games, everything now and in the future. Certainly all our worries about present and future have to be included also. Paul then mentions “powers.” This includes all supernatural and spiritual forces, demons, devils and “elemental spirits of the universe” (Eph. 6: 12; Col. 2:8). He adds height and depth, literally the highest and lowest points of creation. To cement fully his meaning he adds, “nor anything else in all creation” (8:39). Paul is saying that there is nothing in all the universe, physical, material, historical or spiritual that can separate us from Christ’s love. Sin cannot separate us. The law cannot separate us. Tragedy and suffering cannot separate us. Death and Hades cannot separate us (Rev. 1:17-18). We must stand with Paul in this great statement that nothing ***in all creation*** can ever ultimately separate us from God’s love in Christ.
- f. This is a stunning statement. Can even hell separate us from Christ? Is hell a “thing?” Paul never denies suffering and even judgment but those may not be “the end” (I Cor. 15:24). Who is the “all of us” about whom Paul is speaking here? In the context it suggests the elect, those who have been predestined (8:29). But what of the all who sinned in Adam about whom he speaks in 5:12-21? Paul will address these questions in the next three chapters.

## Questions for Us -

1. What are the implications for our daily lives of this climactic, concluding statement? How do we live this out in our present walk with the Lord?
2. Paul acknowledges the pain in life in this passage (Ps. 44:22). How does this passage enable us to feel like “conquerors” in the midst of that pain?
3. What assurance can we take from Paul’s conclusion in 8:38-39?

# The Victory of God – Chapter 9:1-33

## “Understanding This Mystery” – Part 1

In the next three chapters (9-11) Paul once again (as in 7:7-25) seems to be in dialogue with himself. He begins by thinking through what he has just written regarding God’s faithfulness and the fact that nothing “in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (8:39). Paul now reflects on the present state of Israel which, by and large, has rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul earlier had maintained that Israel’s faithlessness could not nullify God’s faithfulness (3:3-4). He now seeks to explain this by saying that, contrary to appearances, Israel’s present rejection is not a failure of God’s word to them but part of a larger plan for both Jew and Gentile.

- I. After the great conclusion of chapter 8 with all of its tremendous hope and affirmation Paul, the individual, and, more specifically, speaking as an individual Jew, expresses his personal sorrow (9:2). Paul goes so far as to say that he would be willing to be accursed himself if this would benefit his “own people” (9:3). It is important to note here at the outset that Paul is not speaking of “Israel” in some abstract or spiritual sense. He means rather the historic covenant people, what he calls “my kindred according to the flesh” (9:3). Paul struggles with the meaning of Israel’s apparent rejection of Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah and Savior. How can this be?
- II. Paul then moves beyond his personal sorrow to consider who the Israelites are. To them, he says, belong “the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises” (9:4). They are the heirs of the patriarchs. Through them has come Jesus the Messiah (9:5).
- III. The reality of Israel’s unbelief would seem to pose a challenge to Paul’s fundamental thesis about the righteousness of God. What Paul has argued up to this point is that God’s righteousness is an expression of his faithfulness. God is faithful to the human race, to the creation itself. Neither sin in its totality, nor Adam as representative of sinful humanity, can ever negate God’s promises. God has promised to make righteous his creation through Jesus Christ. Wherever sin has dominated the grace of God in Christ has “abounded all the more” (5:20). Paul had insisted that Israel’s faithlessness could not nullify God’s faithfulness (3: 3-4). He now has to explain how this is true in the light of Israel’s apparent rejection. The deeper question is this: if the unbelief of Israel, God’s chosen people, can set aside God’s promises, what about God’s other promises for humanity (3:21-26; 5:12-21) to say nothing of his ultimate promise for creation (8:19-25)? Can we count on God’s word no matter what, or is that word somehow dependent on us? And if that is the case what becomes of *God’s* righteousness and faithfulness? Is it the case that *all* things work together for good if we love God (8:28)? Or are there times when this might not be true? Is God’s promise dependent on our love for God? If that is so, how do we ever know if our love for God is sufficient (the question that nearly drove Martin Luther to despair)? Is it really the case that nothing “in all creation” can ever separate us from the love of God (8:38-39)? Or

are their times, even because of our own sin, when this is not true, as when the Psalmist cries out,

“I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help.” – Psalm 88:4

Paul then has to reconcile what he has said up to this point with the vexing example of Israel seeming to be outside God’s promises. The issue then quickly becomes, not Paul’s sorrow over his people, but God’s ultimate plan for them.

- IV. Paul’s response begins with the affirmation that the word of God has not failed, nor could it (9:6). Paul goes on to say that “not all Israelites truly belong to Israel” (9:6). It is not enough to be physically part of Israel. If Israel is defined by the promises of God (and it is, Gen. 15:1-6) then Israel is not simply an historical, biological entity. Abraham had two sons “according to the flesh.” But it was only the second of these, Isaac, who was the child of promise (Gal. 4:21-23). Likewise, Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Yet contrary to custom and standard it was said that “the elder shall serve the younger” (9:12; Gen. 25:23). God goes so far as to say that he loved (favored) Jacob and hated (did not favor) Esau (9:13; Mal. 1:2-3). God shows mercy as he chooses (9:15; Ex. 33:19). God’s choice was made before the two had been born “or had done anything good or bad” (9:11). God’s choice is not based on “human will or exertion” (9:16). This is all about God’s freedom to show mercy “on whom I will have mercy” (9:15). Even Pharaoh, the ancient enemy of Israel, was part of God’s plan (9:17). God shows mercy where he chooses and “hardens the heart of whomever he chooses” (9:18).
- V. Before we want to protest these bold and, to our minds, hard statements we have to see how Paul’s argument is developing. Paul implicitly is saying that we shouldn’t go by appearances when dealing with God’s righteousness and faithfulness. God is working something out which is not apparently evident to the temporal observer. God has defined Israel by a promise. The promise establishes Israel and not the other way around. That promise may well appear contradictory and confusing to us (as it did to Paul). So Paul can say God’s faithfulness is not defined by Israel’s works, faithful or not. This also means that we should not presume to understand how God’s promises are fulfilled. In the moment of despair the promise that “all things work together for good” is clear in terms of what it says but it is not always clear how that promise applies to my particular circumstance when I don’t see anything good happening (when I feel like I am being “accounted as sheep to be slaughtered,” 8:36; Ps. 44:22).
- VI. Somehow Paul is saying that even the rejection of Esau and the idolatrous pride of Pharaoh are being played out as part of God righteous plan to be merciful. Nonetheless, Paul anticipates our next question. If it all depends on God and God makes choices to be merciful or not to people who haven’t even been born, then how can God be just? For Paul the question is logical but inappropriate. Paul invokes the images of the potter from the Old Testament (Isa. 29:16; 45:9; Jer. 18:1-11). This is not the Greek idea of fate, that “whatever will be, will be.” The Biblical idea of predestination never cancels out the idea of human responsibility. We are never automatons. Our decisions and actions matter. God says that he

“hated” Esau but Esau chose to deny his birthright. God never forced him to do so (Heb. 12:15-17). God gave gifts to Esau (Deut. 2:1-5). The point Paul is making is that God’s mercy is not dependent or contingent *in any way* on human action. This was Paul’s own experience (I Tim. 1:12-15).

- VII. The critical theme that Paul will be developing to its fullest in these chapters (9-11) is that God’s ultimate purpose is mercy. God is totally free in showing his mercy (9:15; Ex. 33:19). God is under no obligation to be merciful to his “enemies” (which includes us since we’re all sinners by choice, Rom. 3:23; 5:10). God’s righteousness consists in the fact that God’s word and his promises never fail (Isa. 55:8-11). Even the wicked, “the objects of wrath,” serve God’s purpose of mercy (9:22-23). The Greek text seems to be saying that God literally is “perfecting” the objects of wrath (the same word is used in I Cor. 1:10 “united,” Gal. 6:1 “restore” and I Thess. 3:10 “complete”). Paul’s construction here is awkward, “and in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory.” Paul may be saying that the objects of wrath become the objects of mercy (Ps. 30:4-5; Isa. 54:8; Jer. 51:5; Hosea 11:8-9; Eph. 2:3-5).
- VIII. God’s purposes of wrath and mercy are closely bound up together. God has judged Israel but he has shown mercy to the Gentiles (9:25-26). Yet God has not abandoned Israel. A remnant has remained to guarantee that God’s promises to Israel “according to the flesh” have neither failed nor been forgotten (9:27-29; Isa. 1:9).
- IX. Paul concludes this section with a great paradox. The Gentiles who did not seek for God (1:18-32) nevertheless have found him through faith (9:30), a faith that was often never even clear to them (2:6-16). Yet Israel who strove for righteousness missed it because they did so according to the law. The law ceased for them to be a gift from God (Ps. 119) and had become a selective example of their own spiritual superiority, a superiority which God rejects because of its blatant hypocrisy (2:17-24; Matt. 23). They have stumbled over the rock, Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate hope of both Jews and Gentiles (9:33; Isa. 28:16; 8:14; Rom. 1:16). Yet Israel in its faithlessness is not beyond salvation. Paul will continue.

## Questions for Us -

1. What do you see as Paul’s main concern in this chapter?  
Is his primary issue Israel, or is it something else?
2. Why do you think we find the concept of God showing “mercy on whom he will show mercy” so difficult?
3. How do we reconcile God’s will with our own choices and responsibilities?

# The Victory of God – Chapter 10:1-21

## “Understanding This Mystery” – Part 2

Paul continues to struggle with the mystery of Israel’s election. He again emphasizes his desire for Israel’s salvation (9:1-3). The answer will not come until he (along with us) understands “this mystery” (11:25). In this chapter Paul reflects on the fact that Israel does indeed have “a zeal for God” (10:2) but they have missed the understanding of faith. This is also to say they have misunderstood the nature of God’s righteousness. God’s righteousness saves through faith not through deeds or religious observances. The righteousness that comes through the law is inadequate. Paul’s picture then of Israel is that, chosen by God, they have nonetheless refused to submit to God’s righteousness, “the righteousness that comes through faith” (10:6).

- I. Paul again makes it plain that it is his “heart’s desire and prayer to God” for Israel, the historic nation, to be saved. In the course of his reflection Paul apparently receives an answer to his prayer which will be the climax of chapter 11. At this point however he is struggling to understand God’s plan of election for Israel. In chapter 9 he reflected on God’s freedom in election, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (9:15). He then acknowledged that God’s election involves judgment as well as salvation. Pharaoh being an example (9:17). He also noted that there are distinctions within Israel. Not all Israelites truly belong to Israel (9:6). God himself has created these distinctions as is the case with Jacob and Esau (9:11-13).
- II. These points, while true, are not completely satisfying as has historically been the case with Romans 9 (Karl Barth devotes an extensive exegesis to this chapter in his *Church Dogmatics* which represents probably the best attempt in the twentieth century to analyze it). I would say the bottom line is that chapter 9 is a true but incomplete statement of God’s election (Luther for example goes overboard on it and comes dangerously close to making God the author of evil).
- III. In chapter 10 then Paul turns away from the issue of God’s sovereign power and looks at Israel as being responsible for its present unbelief. Paul testifies that Israel has “a zeal for God” but it is not enlightened (10:2). Throughout history unenlightened religious zeal has been responsible for any number of horrific acts, from war to torture to the burning of suspected witches. Why is Israel’s zeal so unenlightened? Paul claims that it is because Israel tried to establish its own righteousness. The righteousness of God is a pure gift (3:21-28). After receiving this gift through Abraham and Moses Paul is arguing Israel sought to find reasons for its election in itself. In so doing they fell into pride and refused to submit to God’s righteousness (rather than their own, cf. John 8:33).
- IV. Paul then makes the bold statement that “Christ is the end of the law.” The word here for “end” has the meaning of purpose or goal. Christ is the final purpose for the law. By law Paul probably means more than just the ten commandments. He is thinking of the whole sacrificial system of the law. This system acknowledged sin, grace and forgiveness. This was the whole basis of the Day of Atonement (“Yom Kippur,” Lev. 16). Yet Israel had managed to view its keeping of the law, even in the total sense, as somehow dependent upon themselves, as testifying to

their own righteousness (Luke 18:11). Therefore, trusting in themselves and not submitting to God's righteousness, they saw no need to recognize Jesus as their savior.

- V. Paul then goes on to speak from his eschatological perspective, looking at things in the light of God's final plan and purpose for humanity. He points out that the law itself prophesied the coming of Christ (10:6-8, Deut. 30:11-14). Christ has come to his own people as God's fulfillment of his promise to Abraham (4:16). Yet faith requires a response from us (Paul is looking at things differently than he did in chapter 9. His emphasis here is on the human response). Jesus is the fulfillment not only of the hopes of Israel but of the whole world. Faith in him requires confession and belief. It is not about keeping the law (10:5; Lev. 18:5). It is about believing in Jesus Christ (10:9-10).
- VI. God's plan was never only about Israel. This, for Paul, was Israel's mistake in his day. Israel prided itself on its distinctive calling. Yet God's election of Israel was to be for the benefit of the whole world. In Abraham all the nations are to be blessed (Gen. 18:18). Paul then can appeal to the prophets themselves regarding God's universal purpose: "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (10:13; Joel 2:32). Even then in the law God was providing a salvation for the Gentiles as well as the Jews (this argument goes all the way back to chapter 2).
- VII. The message of salvation needs to be heard. It needs to be proclaimed. Paul again appeals to the Old Testament regarding "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news (gospel)," 10:15; Isa. 52:7. People need to hear the message of salvation. Quoting again, Paul cites Isaiah, "Lord, who has believed our message?, " 10:16; Isa. 53:1). Only by hearing will people believe.
- VIII. Paul then returns to his original dilemma regarding Israel. The fact is they have heard the message. It is found throughout their scriptures (18:18, 19, Ps. 19:4, Deut. 32:21). Paul himself had proclaimed the message of Christ in the synagogues as had the other apostles. This goes back to the basic irony that Israel rejected the gospel while the gentiles accepted it (Acts 13:42-48). Yet even this was part of God's plan as stated in the Old Testament (10:20; Isa. 65:1). Yet Paul still comes back to the unresolved problem of his own "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2). Israel has not accepted God's righteousness. They have not believed in Christ. Though chosen by God they remain a "disobedient and contrary people" (10:21; Isa. 65:2). Paul's original question remains. How could it be that God's promises to Israel will remain unfulfilled? What of his conviction that their faithlessness can not nullify God's faithfulness (3:3)? These questions will be answered in the next chapter, one of the most remarkable in all of Scripture.

## Questions for Us -

1. What are some examples of “unenlightened zeal” in our own time? How have we shown this kind of zeal?
2. Why do you think we are so prone to find a basis for righteousness in ourselves? Why is it so important for us to take credit for the faith we profess?
3. Why do you think the question of Israel’s salvation is so important for Paul? What do you think is at stake for him in the issue?

# The Victory of God – Chapter 11:1-36

## “Understanding This Mystery” – Part 3

Paul in this chapter comes to the end of the longest sustained discussion of the meaning of salvation found anywhere in Scripture, a discussion which began in chapter 1, verse 18. In this chapter he comes to the final conclusion (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) of what God intends to do for sinful humanity. In the course of this his question and concern about historic Israel, “my own people,” (9:3) is finally answered. God is never to be taken lightly but God is faithful. He is neither dependent upon, nor thwarted by, the sinfulness of human beings, Jew or Gentile. God’s final purpose is mercy, mercy for all.

- I. Paul returns now to the question of God’s relationship to Israel, to this “disobedient and contrary people” (10:21). He asks, what for him is the ultimate, wrenching question: “Has God rejected his people?” (11:1). His answer is clear, “By no means!” This is the *ninth* time he has used this expression in the letter to the Romans (cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14). His first use of the expression was in response to his own earlier question about Israel, “Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?” (3:3). Paul then identifies himself as an Israelite in the human, historical sense. He is not simply a spiritual descendent of Abraham, which would include all Christians (4:11-12). He is, in particular, “a member of the tribe of Benjamin” (11:1; Phil. 3:4-5). Paul now draws a theological conclusion which answers his earlier concern about Israel’s salvation (10:1). He states, “God has not rejected the people whom he foreknew” (11:2).
- II. He then gives an example from the Old Testament. Elijah felt that he was all alone serving God in Israel. God however tells Elijah that he has kept seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal (11:2-4; I Kings 19:10-18). This establishes for Paul the continuing theme of a remnant (11:5). Israel is never completely faithless. Two points are important here from the Elijah example. First, there is always a remnant of Israel that remains faithful to God. Second, the remnant is always larger than what it appears to be.
- III. The remnant, however, is not a privileged group depending on their own achievements. The remnant is by grace, not by works (11:5-6). This is God’s choice. We are back to the theme of God’s election (11:5; 9:11-12). Paul insists that since the basis of this is grace it is not dependent on works, “otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (11:6). God’s elect then receives the benefit of God’s promise of salvation. Israel failed to obtain this benefit because they sought to establish their own righteousness rather than receive the righteousness that comes from God (10:10:3). As a result they were “hardened” (11:7). This had already been foretold in the Old Testament. Paul proceeds to quote from Deut. 29:4, Isa. 29:10 and Ps. 69:22-23, “let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see” (11:8-10).
- IV. But now Paul raises a fundamental point. Given all that he has said, are we not left with the conclusion that Israel as a whole, as an historic, national people, no longer has any place in God’s plan of salvation. “So I ask,” he says, “have they stumbled so as to fall?” (11:11). Paul evidently has received the answer, “By no

means!" (the **tenth** time). God's plan is now becoming clear to him. Israel's "stumbling" is not the final word. Their failed response to the gospel has become, through God's election, the salvation of the Gentiles. The more Israel rejected, the more the gospel was proclaimed to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-46). Their "defeat" (11:12) has meant "riches for the world" (11:12). Paul then asks, one senses almost breathlessly, "how much more will their full inclusion mean!"

- V. Paul now addresses the Gentiles in his audience (one presumes these are the majority). Paul now seems to have a vision for Israel's final destiny. Their rejection of the gospel brought forth the "reconciliation of the world" (II Cor. 5:19). Paul then asks, "what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!" (11:15). This conjures up not only Christ's resurrection but the vision of the dry bones that Ezekiel had ("these bones are the whole house of Israel" (Ezek. 37:11)), cf. Ezek. 37:1-14. Paul uses the example of an olive tree in which some of the branches have been cut off and "a wild olive shoot" has been grafted in to take their place. Israel is the olive tree (Jer.11:16). The Gentiles are the "wild olive shoot." Paul is being very emphatic here that the Gentiles should not be boastful (11:18). Boasting for Paul is the opposite of grace (Rom. 3:27; Luke 18:9-14). It can lead to someone being "cut off" (11:22). Yet even this does not seem to be permanent. Even those of Israel who persisted in unbelief can be changed because "God has the power to graft them in again" (11:23). Again Israel has stumbled but has not fallen away forever "By no means!" (11:11). If the Gentiles, the "wild olive tree" have been grafted into God's olive tree how much more will Israel, the "natural branches" be grafted back in.
- VI. Paul now comes to the stunning conclusion of his reflection on God's plan of salvation (begun in 1:18). He reveals the mystery which presumably has been revealed to him (11:25). God has hardened part of Israel until "the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25). Here is his conclusion, "And so all Israel will be saved" (11:26). This also had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa. 59:20-21; 27:9). As Jeremiah says, "Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord of hosts, though their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel" (Jer. 51:5).
- VII. The next paragraph is extremely packed. This is the final point of Paul's eschatological vision, one that includes the full effect of God's wrath and the full reality of sin. Paul's double predestination seems to be a "both/and" rather than an "either/or." Israel in terms of the gospel have been "enemies of God" (which was also true of all humanity, Rom. 5:10). This actually benefited the Gentiles ("for your sake"). But in terms of election they are beloved "for the sake of their ancestors" (11:28). Therefore the enemies (rejected by God) have become the beloved (chosen by God). This goes back to the suggestion that the vessels of wrath become the vessels of mercy (9:22-23). What was suggested there is here made explicit.
- VIII. "for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (11:29). This is the final essence of Paul's theology. God called Israel. All of Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness cannot change that. God now calls everyone. All, Gentile and Jew, have been disobedient to God (11:30-31; 3:10, 23). Yet this very disobedience has been in order for God to show mercy. The final conclusion is, "For God has imprisoned all

in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (11:32). As in his other references to “all” throughout the epistle there can be no exceptions, otherwise the “gifts and calling of God” would not be irrevocable.

- IX. Does this mean that everyone will be saved? (cf. Luke 13:22-30). In Colossians Paul speaks of the entire universe being reconciled to God in Christ (Col.1:19-20). To reconcile can only mean to restore, to bring back together, to reunite (Rom. 5:11; II Cor. 5:18-19; Eph. 2:16). Paul’s awesome picture can only lead to praise (11:33-36). God’s ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). Yet there can be no basis for complacency, much less boasting. Jesus will destroy all his enemies (I Cor. 15:24-26). Jesus warns of the unpardonable sin (Mark 3:28-29). After the complete restoration of Israel and the world there is a final picture of the dead rebels where the worm does not die (Isa. 66:24). The followers of Satan will be destroyed (Rev. 20:7-10). There is a final judgment for all (II Cor. 5:10). There is the “second death” (Rev. 20:11-15).
- X. And yet, death itself will be destroyed (I Cor. 15:26). There is a final point where the redemptive work of the Son will be completed and God will be all in all (I Cor. 15:28). Throughout God’s plan of salvation Jesus is Lord of all. He alone has the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:17-18). Nothing can hinder the work of Christ.

*“For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.” – I Cor. 15:22*

- XI. “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” – 11:33-36; Isa. 40:13; Job 41:11

## Questions for Us -

1. Given Paul’s view of Israel’s final destiny, what should our attitude be toward Jews today?
2. What are some of the ways that the affirmation, “for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) strengthens us in times of distress and doubt?
3. How can we witness to the gospel as the expression of God’s mercy to all?

## The Victory of God – Chapter 12:1-21 “Living in Mercy”

Paul, having completed his exposition of God’s plan and purpose of salvation, now turns to the question of Christian living. His view of Christian life is no less revolutionary than his view of God’s all-encompassing mercy in salvation. For Paul, “mercy,” not the law, is the standard for Christian life. Paul is not abandoning the law as the expression of the “will of God” (Rom. 2:18). But the Christian life is not adherence to rules. It is grounded in grace and love to the extent of blessing those who persecute us. It is life in the one body of Christ, the community, in which no one is superior to anyone else.

- I. Paul’s ethical appeal is based on “the mercies of God” (12:1) and nothing else. The Christian life, contrary to church practice throughout history, cannot be a matter of obligation or compulsion. Still less can it be motivated by guilt feelings. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism the Christian life is an expression of thankfulness to God for his mercy. Paul believes that the more we contemplate God’s mercies (plural) the more we will desire to serve him so that we can know more of his mercy and express our gratitude.
- II. Paul states that God’s mercies should lead us to present our “bodies as a living sacrifice.” Sacrifices as a form of ritual or religious observance were known both in Judaism and in many of the cults and religions of the ancient world. Paul envisions Christians as temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). Our very lives are “spiritual worship.” We do not need a physical temple or proscribed religious ritual to live this out. We are the temple. We are the worship. Paul is not negating worship in a formal sense. He is however putting an emphasis on the idea of Christian living itself being worship. The body of Christ is not a building, a temple or even a church. The body of Christ is the community of believers in Jesus Christ.
- III. Paul’s next instruction is “Do not be conformed to this world” (12:2). What does he mean by this? He doesn’t mean that we should try and escape from the world or seek to avoid it (the world is the focus on God’s mission in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:8; I Cor. 5:9-10; II Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:3-6; I Tim. 1:15). He probably has two ideas here. The first is that Christians are not to follow the standards of the world. Paul does not compromise on his position of Christian freedom based on God’s mercy (Gal. 5:1). At the same time this freedom is to be used responsibly as we discern the will of God revealed in Scripture (I Cor. 6:12-20). The second idea is that we are not to be limited to the prospects of this world. The salvation of the world envisioned in the earlier chapters of Romans would appear impossible to someone who only looked at the present reality of the Roman Empire. Part of Paul’s call to discernment is to see with spiritual eyes. God is able to do so much more than we can think or imagine (Eph. 3:20). This is what he means by the “renewing of your minds.” God in Christ is bringing about a “new creation” (II Cor. 5:17). The will of God, already revealed in the Old Testament, testifies to that which is “good and acceptable and perfect,” ideals which the best of the Greek and Roman philosophers would have accepted (cf. Rom. 2:7).

- IV. Paul now raises another critical standard for Christians. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (12:3). We all stand under grace (12:3). As he insists repeatedly throughout the epistle there is no basis for boasting (2:23; 3:27; 4:2; 11:18; Eph. 2:8-9). In chapter 14 he will develop this further in the idea that we are not to judge one another (14:4). God has given each of us a measure of faith (12:3). This suggests that there may be different measures but if that is the case it is not because we are better than someone else because it is God who gives the measure.
- V. Paul brings up a crucial image for him. Christians make up the body of Christ (12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12-31). This was a familiar image in the ancient world. A family or city was often thought of as being made up of many and different members. Paul underscores this idea. We do not have the same function (12:4). We have different gifts (12:6-8). Again these gifts come only from the grace of God (12:6). There is no hierarchy here, no basis for boasting or any feeling of superiority. There is absolutely no basis for judging another person's gifts or how they use them. Each gift is to be used properly. From prophecy (proclaiming God's Word) to compassion each has its own proper role and function.
- VI. The central point of the Christian life and indeed of all Christian community is love. "Let love be genuine" (12:9; I Cor. 13:1-13). For Paul the whole of the Christian life is summed up in the statement, "Love you neighbor as yourself" (13:9; Lev. 19:18). Love for Paul is not blind. It identifies what is evil and hates it. Paul would have had no problem with the paradoxical statement that "love hates evil." It holds fast to what is good. Love is therefore discerning. For Paul the works of the flesh (that which opposes God) are obvious. No less obvious is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-26). For Paul love is more than an attitude. It is a summons to action. Love requires "mutual affection" (12:10). It calls for serving the Lord with zeal and enthusiasm (12:11). The life of love is easily summarized. It involves
- i. Rejoicing in hope
  - ii. Patience in suffering
  - iii. Perseverance in prayer
  - iv. Contributing to the "needs of the saints"
  - v. Extending hospitality to strangers

This is not an exhaustive list but these are signs of the love which for Paul is the **sole basis** of the Christian life and the fulfillment of the law (12:12-13; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14; Phil. 2:1-11).

- VII. Yet Paul will always stress the freedom of the Christian (Gal. 5:1, 13). Love must always coexist with this freedom. It can never be reduced to a code of specific regulations (Col. 2:16-23). This point needs to be emphasized. The oldest and, in fact, most enduring heresy in the Christian church could be called "Christian pharisaism." Despite the opposition of many Pharisees to Jesus a number of them did become Christians. Yet they insisted that requirements of the law be kept to the point that those who failed to do so could not be saved

(Acts 15:1-5). The first major church council which took place in Jerusalem debated this matter. In spite of the clear testimony of Paul, Barnabas and Peter the council equivocated to the point of even requiring Gentile Christians to keep parts of the Old Testament dietary laws! (cf. Acts 15:6-29; Lev. 17:10-13). This was apparently never followed by any Gentile congregation even in the New Testament period. Still, Christian pharisaism has persisted throughout history as a mortal enemy of the gospel. Paul's definitive response to the heresy is found in his epistle to the Galatians.

VIII. Paul's next section follows up Jesus' teaching of loving one's enemies (Matt. 5:38-48). We are to bless those who persecute us. This is only possible in the radical freedom which the gospel gives us. Love enables us to think of others, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:12:14-15). Paul then addresses two major concerns that his Gentile audience living in a Greek speaking society would have recognized. The first is the element of pride or arrogance (what the Greeks called "hubris"). The Gentiles recognized this as a deadly trait (Paul has already referred to it as "boasting" throughout the epistle (2:17; 2:23; 3:27; 4:2; 11:18). Paul puts it bluntly, "do not be haughty but associate with the lowly" (12:16). This is the opposite of the world's standard.

Paul then addresses the theme of revenge which was celebrated throughout Greek literature and culture. Achilles takes revenge on Hector who killed his cousin. Orestes takes revenge on his mother for killing his father. Medea murders her own children in order to revenge herself on her husband, Jason. Paul's Roman audience grew up with these stories. Paul rejects this model completely. Christians are never to repay evil for evil (what the Greek heroes did all the time). They are to seek to live peaceably "with all." As noted earlier, Paul's use of "all" does not admit of exceptions. Paul quotes from the Old Testament, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord (12:19; Deut. 32:35). We are to show kindness to our enemies. This already was established in the law of Moses (Ex. 23:4-5). In showing kindness we are in fact adding to the punishment of the wrongdoer (12:20; Prov. 25:21-22). The fundamental truth is that evil cannot be overcome by evil. It can only be overcome by what is good (12:21). All of this is the freedom of love in action.

## Questions for Us -

1. Why do you think Paul bases his appeal for Christian commitment on "the mercies of God?" What lessons can we learn from his statement?
2. Why do you think it is so difficult for us *not* to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (to not be haughty)?
3. How can we demonstrate love that is "genuine?"
4. Why do you think "Christian pharisaism" has continued in the church down to the present day?
5. Why do you think we find revenge so appealing? Why don't we realize we are tempting to play God when we take vengeance into our own hands?

## The Victory of God – Chapter 13:1-14 “Wake Up!”

Paul continues in this chapter with his concern of how to live the Christian life. The universal aspect of the gospel comes into play here. Christians are not a special, distinctive unit within society (as the Jews sought to maintain themselves). They are part of society. Paul does not accept a separation of the secular from the sacred. Christians certainly are to be distinctive in how they live but nonetheless they live in the present world fully, always acknowledging that the new age in Christ is starting to break through already. Again Paul's perspective is *eschatological*. He is seeing and understanding the present in the light of God's future kingdom.

- I. Paul addresses the whole nature of government and Christians' attitude toward it. Paul's view is one that many of his fellow Pharisees would probably not have accepted. He states that “there is no authority except from God” and, further, the existing authorities “have been instituted by God” (13:1). Many of the Jews of Paul's day would have had difficulty accepting the idea that the Roman government had been instituted by God. In fact it would appear to be the very opposite.
- II. Paul's view is actually very revolutionary and often people don't grasp that. He says that since authority, and here he is *not* talking about religious authority but rather the authority of the secular state, has been instituted by God that “whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed” (13:2). Paul never identifies the concept “authority” with any particular government, Roman or otherwise. Paul is giving no defense of a government status quo. Authority comes from God and has been ordained by him. All rulers at all levels need to recognize this. Given the way Paul has set up his argument rulers as well as subjects could resist the “authority” which God has appointed.
- III. Paul is subtly but clearly challenging the divine nature of the Caesars of Rome. Beginning with the deification of Caesar Augustus (after his death) later Caesars saw themselves as “sons of gods” or some kind of divine agent. Therefore whatever they did was justified because they had inherent divine authority. Paul completely rejects this idea. All authority is God's authority. This provides an external standard against which all specific earthly authorities (ecclesiastical as well as secular) can be measured. Rulers are servants of God (13:4) not independent agents.
- IV. Authority coming from God has a moral base in the standard of God's Word. Rulers are to support the good and punish the bad (13:3). Paul calls for submission to rulers who consistently act as God's servant to do “what is good” (13:3). God based authority has its own power, derived from God himself. The “authority” does not “bear the sword in vain” (13:4). It executes wrath on the wrongdoer. Out of one's conscience the Christian especially should appreciate and submit to whomever acts as “God's servants” (13:6). This includes paying taxes. We are to pay to all whatever is due them (13:7). This refers not only to taxes but to the giving of proper respect and honor.

- V. Paul therefore has presented a very nuanced view of government. His implications are clear. All earthly rulers are under the authority of God. This carries with it the responsibility to promote the good and punish the wrongdoer. However Paul makes clear that authority *per se* never resides in the ruler just because he/she is the ruler. This was the claim of the Roman Caesars. Their authority was inherent and divinely established in the sense that they could ultimately (and did) make their own rules, their own standards. For Paul this is not possible given the fact that “there is no authority except from God.” Authority itself then, as established by God, has certain basic standards. It must promote “what is good” and punish what is evil. For Paul there was no question that these standards were defined in God’s Word. The Roman Caesar might not know God’s Word at all but he was still under its authority.
- VI. Paul does not discuss in this passage (as he does in others such as Ephesians 6:10-17) what happens when earthly rulers follow “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12). The implication is nonetheless clear that rulers of any kind do not have an inherent right to do whatever they please. They are here called to account, to exercise God’s authority properly. Commentators have often compared Romans 13 to Revelation 13 where we see the demonic character of earthly rulers. These rulers, with their mark of the beast, are to be resisted.
- VII. It is a sad commentary that once Christianity had the sanction of the Roman government it lost the cutting edge of Paul’s view. Government as a protector of the church was thereby accorded automatic “respect” and “honor.” Paul’s view in Romans 13 certainly lies behind many of the themes of our own Declaration of Independence which was signed by our American Presbyterian forebear, the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon.
- VIII. Paul now turns to the basic standard of Christian living. This is the commandment to “love one another.” This is based on the requirement to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Love for Paul fulfills the law. Paul then gives no explicit set of commands for Christian living. The whole idea of making such a list is rejected by him (Col. 2:20-23) He also deals with this theme in the next chapter of Romans.
- IX. Paul is not giving a blanket affirmation of love as a feeling or a sentiment. Love for Paul, as authority, is grounded in God. He would agree with John that “God is love” (I John 4:16). Love then seeks to fulfill God’s will. It does not do so by following the specific standards of the law (Jesus himself breaks these standards on numerous occasions by eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17), picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8), declaring all foods to be clean (Mark 7:19)). Rather love seeks out the larger purpose of the law, to glorify God and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).
- X. Paul concludes this section with a focus on the eschatological. We await our salvation. The Lord is coming, “the night is far gone, the day is near” (13:12). Paul continually reminds us of the cosmic struggle in which we find ourselves (13:12). The opposite of living in love is following the “works of darkness”

(13:12). These include everything from drunkenness to quarreling and jealousy (13:13). These things are the very opposite of love. Paul has no illusions that we will be free from the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:17). However he calls us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (13:14). It is only as we surrender to Christ more and more that we can resist the temptations in the world around us (I Cor. 10:13).

## Questions for Us -

1. Given what Paul says in this chapter what should be our attitude to the “governing authorities” in our world? What does it mean for us to be subject to earthly authorities? What are the boundaries of such subjection?
2. How can we live out the idea of love being the “fulfilling of the law?” Why do we often feel that we need rules and regulations?
3. What do you think Paul means by calling us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ?” What would be some examples of this?

# The Victory of God – Chapter 14:1-23

## “Who Are You To Pass Judgment?”

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none,  
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”  
- Martin Luther “The Freedom of a Christian”

Paul in this chapter is addressing the critical issue of Christian freedom. This is a central aspect of his understanding of the gospel (Rom. 8:21; Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:20-23). It is unfortunately one of the most neglected parts of his teaching. Paul affirms that there is room for diversity in the Christian community. Those who feel obliged to keep certain customs and rituals he describes as “weak.” Yet their views are to be respected. Nonetheless Paul will not compromise his statement that things in themselves are neither good or bad. Everything depends on how it is used (14:14). This freedom obviously does not extend to actions that overtly violate God’s will according to his Word (I Cor. 6:12-20).

I. Paul makes a distinction between those who are “weak in the faith” and those whom he sees as misrepresenting the gospel (Gal. 1:6ff.). There are several contexts out of which Paul is speaking. The first has to do with the Jewish dietary laws. These are included in the Holiness Code of the Old Testament (Leviticus 11). The purpose of the Holiness Code was to identify Israel as a people separated unto the Lord, to be holy as God was holy (Lev. 19:2). They were not to be physically separated from other people (otherwise they would never have gone into the promised land). They were however to live by a different standard. We need to remember that the purpose of the Holiness Code was to keep Israel from prostituting themselves to goat-demons (Lev. 17:7). The danger of not only idolatry but the occult and the demonic has always threatened the people of God (Ex. 32, Numbers 25).

Yet as basic and fundamental as these laws were to the Jewish people they were not intended to last forever. Christ fulfills this part of the law so that in the gospel all foods are now clean (Matt. 5:17-18; Mark 7:17-23). The early Jewish Christians however had great difficulty in accepting this teaching (Acts 15:28-29; Gal. 2:11-14).

There was another related food matter which pertained to the Gentile Christians. Much of the meat sold in the market places of Rome, Corinth and other cities of the empire had been offered to one of the Roman gods before being sold. This was largely a ceremonial action. Many businesses and organizations of the Roman Empire offered token worship to one of the Greek or Roman gods (this included the emperor himself more and more). Some Christians then felt that to eat meat which had been offered to a pagan god was somehow to participate in idolatry. This could apply to buying food in the market or attending a dinner given by someone who followed this practice (I Cor. 10:27-30).

- II. Paul was convinced that getting caught up in such concerns was not a major issue. “Strong” or mature Christians could dispense with such things. Yet Paul acknowledged that younger or “weaker” believers could well be disturbed by doing things that would trouble them in their faith. Paul, speaking in a pastoral mode, is saying that such “weaker” brothers and sisters should not be looked down upon or criticized. These believers might only eat vegetables so that there was not a danger that they were eating meat that had been offered to an idol. Paul is stating emphatically that such believers should not be despised by the so-called stronger believers (14:1-3). Paul is convinced that the church should have room for both groups. He raises his fundamental question, “Who are you to pass judgment?” (14:4). This goes back to Jesus himself (Matt. 7:2).
- III. Paul expands on his point by noting that differences of worship and devotion vary from person to person. Whether a person observes a given day rather than another (Sunday vs. Saturday, the Sabbath) is up to them. As long as the person is honoring the Lord and giving thanks to him their particular choice of religious practice should be up to them (14:5-6).
- IV. Clearly however there is a problem in this congregation. It is in fact a problem that tends to exist in every Christian group. It is the sin of judgmentalism, passing judgment on other Christians who behave in ways different from us. Clearly the issue of passing judgment had reached the point where certain Christians were being despised by others. In these cases the rule of love essentially had been lost (Rom. 13:8; I Cor. 13). Paul emphasizes that we have no right to judge other Christians’ worship or spiritual life. He reminds his readers (and us) that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (14:10; II Cor. 5:10). We are all accountable to him. We shouldn’t worry about other Christians (14:12).
- V. Paul then goes on to add that, not only should we not be passing judgment on one another (and this is the fourth time he has mentioned that in this chapter), we should also not place a “stumbling block” in the way of another believer (14:13-14). What does he mean by this? First, we have to clarify again his point that nothing in itself is unclean. Appealing to God’s good creation this has to include not only food but politics, art, sex and entertainment in general (I Tim. 4:4). Paul however is also affirming the freedom of the conscience. If someone feels that something is “unclean” or not right we should not flaunt our freedom in front of them nor pressure them to act contrary to their conscience. For example, the “strong” Christian should not be eating meat that had been offered to an idol in front of another believer if by doing so he shakes the faith of that believer. The “weaker” brother/sister could be asking, “How could you be eating that meat when you’re supposed to be a Christian (and a “mature” Christian at that)?” In other words their faith could be shaken by the freedom of the stronger Christian. By the same token such a weaker believer should not be pressed into following the example of the stronger sister/brother if they have doubts about the practice (whatever it is). An obvious example might be pressing someone who is a recovering alcoholic to have a drink because God has made “wine to gladden the human heart”

(Ps. 104:15). Paul is concerned enough about this to acknowledge that by setting a disturbing example for a weaker sister/brother we could in fact be bringing about “the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (14:16). The kingdom of God is not about such practices, food or drink or whatever. It is about “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17).

- VI. Paul reaffirms his conviction that everything is clean in itself (14:20). We have to watch however the effect that our freedom may have on someone weaker in the faith. We should refrain from doing anything that might undermine the faith of a weaker believer (14:21). The real issue for Paul is that the weaker sister/brother is in fact weak in their faith. That is the reason for their reluctance to do whatever disturbs them. Our task is not to abuse that weaker faith but rather help that believer grow in their faith. Paul adds that those who do have such doubts are “blessed” (14:22). However the person with doubts condemns themselves if they violate their conscience because they are at this point in their spiritual life unable to act from faith (14:23). Quite simply whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (14:23). Paul is really saying that we have to try and help the weaker believer not to depend on external practices, “do’s and don’ts,” so that they can truly come to a mature faith. What Paul says here does not apply to clear violations of standards in God’s Word. Paul grants that “all things are lawful” (I Cor. 6:12) but we are not to “use our freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence” (Gal. 5:13). On the other hand we are not to tolerate others who would seek to undermine our Christian freedom (Gal. 2:4-5). These are not examples of weak faith but rather they have grown into a distorted faith which appears to be strong. These have to be refuted to their face as Paul refuted Peter (Gal. 2:11-14; cf. Acts 15:5-11).

## Questions for Us –

1. Why are we so prone to pass judgment on other Christians, especially those who are in some ways different from us?
2. How do we balance freedom in Christ with not placing a “stumbling block” in the way of a weaker sister/brother? How do we hold freedom and love together?
3. How do we apply Paul’s statement that nothing is unclean in itself but it is only unclean to the person who thinks it unclean (Rom. 14:14)?

# The Victory of God – Chapter 15:1-33

## “What Christ Has Accomplished”

Paul is coming to the conclusion of this, his most extended and influential epistle. As he has done in other epistles (especially those to the Corinthians) he gives a summary of his mission with both its hopes and dangers. Uppermost in his mind are two goals. The first is to unify the church with both Jews and Gentiles (1:16). Second is to complete his mission to the Gentile world so that God’s plan of universal salvation can be realized (11:25-32).

- I. Paul continues with the discussion of “weaker” and “stronger” Christians (the chapter divisions were not in the original text). The “strong” for Paul are those, including himself, who are able to live in the freedom of the gospel (Gal. 5:1). He acknowledges that those who are still bound to matters of the law or to external regulations are guilty of “failings” (Col. 2:20-23). Yet for Paul the unity of the body of Christ has priority over these matters of freedom and conscience. The strong, quite simply he says, are to “put up” with the “failings of the weak” (15:1).

Our goal must be to build up our neighbor. He offers the example of Christ who did not come to please himself but rather to suffer for our sake. He bore insults and abuse (15:3; Ps. 69:9). Our encouragement and hope is based on Scripture (not what others, strong or weak, think of us) (15:4). Paul’s desire is that Christians live in “harmony with one another” (15:5). With one voice we should glorify God (15:6). Paul’s view of unity then is not based on identity. He has no expectation that Christians will agree on everything. As he has said, “Let all be fully convinced in their own minds” (14:5). We should not judge one another (14:4). Sadly, this has not been the case throughout history. Paul will not compromise on his freedom in Christ (Gal. 2:4-5). Nor will he abandon the unity of the church (12:4-5).

Yet for Paul there are definite boundaries. If one goes too far in compromising the freedom of the gospel, one is in danger of losing the gospel itself (Gal. 1:6-12). On the other hand the church cannot tolerate flagrant immorality in the name of unity (I Cor. 5:1-2). This balance has been difficult to maintain. We should nevertheless prayerfully pursue it for Paul’s ultimate goal of building up the Body of Christ (I Thess. 5:11).

- II. The reality of the church for Paul is that it includes Jew and Gentile both. This was the first major crisis of the early church, the attempt to try and make Gentile Christians into practicing Jews (Acts 15:3-5). Paul fought against this to maintain the life of the church as the eschatological (ultimate, future) expression of God’s new humanity in Christ. Paul reaffirms here the fact that the salvation of the Gentiles is itself part of the faith of Israel. He quotes numerous passages from the Old Testament regarding God’s promises to the Gentiles (15:9; Ps. 18:49; 15:10; Deut. 32:43; 15:11; Ps. 117:1; 15:12; Isa. 11:10). For Paul then the inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s plan of salvation

as Gentiles (not needing to be converted to Judaism first) is well established in Scripture (the Old Testament).

III. Paul now strikes a conciliatory note. He speaks highly of the Roman Christians (“full of goodness, filled with all knowledge”, 15:14). However he grants that he has written to them “rather boldly” (15:15). Paul wants to make clear that he has a ministry to the Gentiles. This is a commission from God received through God’s grace (15:15-16). He is seeking to win the obedience of the Gentiles to Christ “by word and deed” and ultimately “by the power of the Spirit of God” (15:18-19). From Jerusalem to Illyricum (in to northeast Italy and the Balkans) he has fully proclaimed the good news of Christ (15:19). His desire has been to proclaim Christ where he is not known (15:20-21; Isa. 52:15). Paul can only have touched on these locations but at least Christ was proclaimed there. Paul’s thoughts now turn toward Western Europe.

IV. It has been this extended mission which has prevented Paul from visiting the Romans up to this time (however in his greetings in the final chapter it seems clear that he knew many of the people in the congregation at Rome). Paul wants to extend his mission to Spain. There has been much discussion over the years regarding Paul’s understanding of his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. When he states that there is “no further place for me in these regions” (15:23) he cannot mean that all of Asia minor and indeed Greece and Italy have been completely evangelized. He cannot even mean that there is a Christian community in every city (which certainly was not the case). This is a point where it is important to understand the eschatological nature of Paul’s self understanding. For Paul the gospel had been proclaimed everywhere except the Western regions of Europe (he doesn’t discuss northern Europe). He certainly can’t mean that everyone else had heard the gospel. Paul however is thinking in global terms.

For Paul the wrath of God is universal and is presently directed at “all ungodliness and wickedness” (1:18) but, more importantly, so is God’s grace and mercy (11:32). If “Adam” identifies a whole historical epic, a whole way of being human in sin, so Christ now defines a new way of being, of having received the righteousness of God (5:12-21). If the remnant of disobedient Israel is a sign that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26) then the present remnant of believing Gentiles is equally a sign of “the full number of the Gentiles” coming to faith (11:25). Paul states in the second chapter that those “who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality” will receive eternal life (2:7). This led early Christian writers like Justin Martyr in the second century to believe that pagans like Socrates were Christians without their actually knowing Jesus by name.

V. Paul acknowledges that his visit to Rome will have to wait until he delivers a special offering for the church in Jerusalem (15:25-26). He notes that it is appropriate for the newly converted Gentiles to assist the “poor among the saints at Jerusalem” (15:26). Having received the spiritual benefits of the gospel from the apostolic church in Jerusalem these Gentiles can now offer material help to that church in its time of economic need (15:27). Missions always involves fund raising.

Paul asks for prayer that he may “be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea” and that his mission to Jerusalem will be successful so that he may come to the church in Rome “with joy and be refreshed in your company” (15:32). We know this was not to be the case. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21-22). Paul does come to Rome but he does so as a prisoner who has appealed to the Emperor because he doesn’t believe he’ll get a fair hearing in the Jerusalem area (Acts 25:10-12). The picture in Acts is that Paul is able to speak freely under a form of house arrest for two years in Rome (Acts 28:30-31).

The body of the letter appears to end at this point with Paul’s “Amen” (15:33). However he adds some concluding comments which constitute chapter 16.

## The Victory of God – Chapter 16:1-27

### “Satan Crushed”

Paul here is giving his final thoughts and greetings to the church at Rome, the church he hopes to visit as part of his continuing missionary journey to Spain (15:22-24). We know that events did not turn out as Paul planned. The conclusion of this comprehensive statement of the gospel (unique in the New Testament) reveals both something of the composition of the early church and Paul's fervent concerns for its effective ministry.

#### I. Personal Greetings – 16:1-16

At first glance this can look like simply a long list of names. However there are a number of revealing things about the list which gives us insight not only into the church at Rome but probably also the Gentile churches of the empire which Paul had worked so hard to establish. We can note several things:

1. Phoebe (16:1-2) is probably the bearer of the letter. She clearly is a woman of authority in the church since the title “deacon” already was being used of leaders in the church (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8-13). The term may also have indicated a minister. Stephen, as a deacon, certainly had a preaching and teaching ministry (Acts 6:8-10). Phoebe is also referred to as a “patroness” or “benefactor.” The male term, “patron” also carried the idea of someone of authority.
2. Along these lines many of those whom Paul mentions in this section are women: Prisca (16:3), Mary “who has worked very hard among you” (16:6), Junia (16:7) who along with Andronicus was “prominent among the apostles” (Later attempts were made to change the name to “Junias” indicating a male. However, the male form has not been found in any ancient literature), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (16:12), obviously women (possibly sisters), Persis who has worked hard in the Lord (16:12) and finally, the mother of Rufus who had also been a mother to Paul (16:13).

This list leaves no doubt that women had authoritative positions in the early church (cf. Phil. 4:2-3). It is a later tradition drawing on Greek culture that led to the view that only men could have leadership roles in the church (The dominant Greek gods were all male. Plato believed that women were inherently inferior to men). That view became the basis for interpreting texts like I Cor. 14:34 and I Tim. 2:11-12 as applying to all women without distinction. Such a view cannot be maintained in the light of Paul's full teaching. A partial or prejudiced reading of Scripture can only lead to distortion in the church or worse, satanic readings of the text (Matt. 4:5-6).

3. A second notable point about the list is the fact that it contains both Jewish and Gentile names. This should not be surprising considering Paul's extended treatment in the letter of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles (especially chapters 9-11). Several of these were relatives of Paul, Andronicus and Junia (16:7) and Herodian (16:11). Other names

such as Asyncritus, Urbanus and certainly Hermes would appear to be Gentiles. Several of these may have been slaves.

4. Finally it is obvious that Paul already knew many people in Rome even if he had never visited there (1:10). He ends this greeting with the admonition to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16). In a number of the Roman cults there were clearly unholy kisses (cf. Prov. 7:10-20; Rev. 17:1-2).

## II. Final words – 16:17-24

Paul’s final word of instruction to the church at Rome is for them “to keep an eye of those who cause dissension and offenses” (16:17). Paul says quite bluntly, “avoid them.” He warns against “smooth talk and flattery” (16:18). This is consistent with other warnings Paul gives to those who distort the “teaching” he has presented. In speaking to the Ephesian elders he warns about “savage wolves” coming into the church “even from your own group” (Acts 20:29-30). Paul warns Timothy about Alexander the Coppersmith (II Tim. 4:14-15). He instructs Titus, after a “first and second admonition to have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions” (Titus 3:10). In our fairly therapeutic culture we often want to keep going after people who resist the church’s teaching. Paul warns that there are people we should simply avoid. John puts it succinctly, “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (I John 2:19).

Paul calls for discernment. He wants the Romans “to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil” (16:19). This conforms to Jesus’ admonition to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). Also consistent with this is John’s call to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (I John 4:1). We are not to be naïve and unaware. Peter calls us to “keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8).

Paul then offers the strong promise that “the God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet” (16:20). This is a powerful statement given that Paul and the rest of the early church were soon to undergo major persecution. Again this is an apocalyptic (final revealing) note in Paul’s exposition. It harks back to the ancient prophecy in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) and includes the assurance from Psalms, “You will tread on the lion and the adder” (both symbols of Satan) (Ps. 91:13). This also echoes Jesus’ statement that he will build his church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matt. 16:18). Christians have no reason to fear the powers of evil. John states, “for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (I John 4:4).

Paul now ends with final greetings mentioning Timothy along with other co-workers (16:22). We then have the statement from Tertius, “the writer of this letter” (16:22). How much input Tertius had we do not know for sure. Most probably he wrote down Paul’s verbal statements and perhaps helped edit them into the form we have in the epistle. The final greetings from Gaius and Erastus strongly base the location for the writing of the epistle in Corinth (I Cor. 1:14; II Tim. 4:20).

Paul then concludes with a benediction. He summarizes the great truth of the epistle that God's plan of salvation includes the Gentiles (16:25-26; 1:5-6; Eph. 3:1-6). Indeed it includes the whole world (II Cor. 5:19). All of this is to the glory of God (16:27). So ends the most extensive discussion of God's plan of salvation in the New Testament. Amen!

## Questions for Us –

1. What does it say about us as Christians that the role of women in the church was dominated for centuries by Greek philosophy and mythology rather than by Scripture? What are other examples of Christians being influenced by cultural, rather than Biblical, views?
2. How do we apply Paul's teaching about "those who cause dissensions and offenses" in the church (16:17-18)? How can we balance the need for encouragement (I Thess. 4:18) with the need to "avoid them?"
3. What hope for Christian living do we take from the promise, "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet" (16:20)? What do you think this means?

# The Epistle to the Romans: Review

## The Meaning of Romans

Paul's Letter to the Romans is perhaps the most influential single book in the New Testament. Paul presents here, occasionally in a series of ad hoc arguments (recorded and possibly edited by Tertius), a comprehensive picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel which is good news for Gentiles as well as Jews. This gospel in fact is good news for the entire universe. Paul lays out God's final plans for redemption and salvation. Hence the gospel can be called "eschatological" since it points to God's final purpose not only for humanity but for all creation. It is unfortunate that too often the central teachings of Romans have been missed by the church.

- I. Outline of Romans
  - a. Greeting – 1:1-1:17
    - i. Paul writes to a church where he knows many people but which he has in fact never visited – 1:10
    - ii. The gospel reveals the "righteousness of God" to "the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16-17)
  - b. The Human Reality – 1:18-3:20
    - i. God's wrath is revealed against the Gentiles – 1:18-32
    - ii. The Jews however are no better off – 2:1-5, 17-29
    - iii. The Gentiles in fact can be saved without the law – 2:6-16
    - iv. All, Jews and Gentiles, are under the power of sin - 3:9-18
    - v. No one will be saved by the law because the law only brings the knowledge of sin – 3:20
  - c. The Righteousness of God – 3:21-31
    - i. God makes us righteous in spite of our sin by the gift of his grace received through faith – 3:21-26
    - ii. There is no room for boasting by either Jew or Gentile – 3:27-31
  - d. The Example of Abraham – 4:1-25
    - i. Abraham received God's favor because God promised it to him. He did nothing to earn it. – 4:1-12
    - ii. The promise is received through faith, not works – 4:13-25
  - e. God's Grace Precedes the Law – 5:1-21
    - i. God's goodness received in faith changes us from being God's enemies to being those who have peace with Him. He fortifies us in the struggles of life – 5:1-11
    - ii. In Adam all are under the power of sin and death but in Christ all are justified and made righteous – 5:12-21

- f. Does it then matter how we live? – chapters 6-7
  - i. Having been freed from sin why should we want to return to it? – 6:1-23
  - ii. The Law offers us no hope in coming to God – 7:1-6
  - iii. The Law is good and holy but because of our sin it can't help us – 7:7-13
  - iv. In trying to follow the Law we only encounter the frustration of our sinful nature – 7:14-24
  - v. Our only hope is in Christ – 7:25
  
- g. The unfolding of God's plan – chapter 8
  - i. God's Spirit gives us the power to live for Christ – 8:1-17
  - ii. God's all encompassing purpose is to restore creation itself. This is our unseen hope. – 8:18-25
  - iii. God is in control of everything and our unshakeable confidence is the fact that nothing in all creation can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord – 8:26-39
  
- h. What About Israel and How Do the Gentiles fit into God's Plan? – chapters 9-11
  - i. Paul grieves over Israel's unbelief – 9:1-5
  - ii. God has always maintained a remnant – 9:6-13
  - iii. God's purpose determines everything, both his wrath and his favor – 9:14-29
  - iv. Israel's failure has been the occasion for the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's plan of salvation – 9:30-33
  - v. It can appear that Israel has been left out because they have not accepted Jesus Christ – chapter 10
  - vi. God has not and will not reject Israel, his chosen people – 11:1-12
  - vii. Israel's rejection is temporary allowing the Gentiles to be grafted into Israel, the "olive tree" – 11:13-24; Jer. 11:16
  - viii. Now the mystery of God's plan is revealed: Israel was rejected temporarily so that the gospel could come to the Gentiles – 11:25
    - 1. all Israel will be saved because "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" – 11:26-29
    - 2. "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" – 11:30-32
    - 3. ALL PRAISE TO GOD! – 11:33-36
  
- I. Now how shall we live? - chapters 12-14
  - a. The Basis of Christian living – the mercies of God – 12:1-2
  - b. We are all members of one body – 12:3-8
  - c. Love is the expression of the Christian life – 12:9-13; 13:8-10
  - d. Do not seek vengeance – "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord – 12:19
  - e. Obey earthly authorities "for the authorities are God's servants" – 13:1-7

- f. Make no provision to gratify the desires of the flesh (sinful nature) – 13:11-14
- g. Do not judge others – 14:1-13
- h. “nothing is unclean in itself” – 14:14; I Tim. 4:4
- i. Be aware of the example you set for others who may be weaker in the faith – 14:15-23

J. Final Thoughts and Greetings – chapters 15-16

- a. Welcome and encourage one another – 15:1-7
- b. God’s plan has always included the Gentiles – 15:8-13
- c. Paul’s mission is to continue to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. He hopes to go to Spain. – 15:14-33
- d. Greetings to men and women leaders in the church – 16:1-16
- e. Avoid those who cause dissension in the church – 16:17-20
- f. Farewell from Corinth – 16:21-24
- g. Benediction – 16:25-27

- II. The Meaning of Romans: God has allowed sin into the world so that through Jesus Christ Jew and Gentile alike might know God’s intimate love, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. This was not possible through nature (Gentiles) or the law (Israel).

Questions for Us –

1. How has the study of Romans changed your understanding of the Christian faith?
2. What did you find most difficult in this epistle?
3. What did you find most hopeful?