

*ROMANS:  
A STUDY GUIDE*

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All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. *2 Timothy 3:16*

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ESV. English Standard Version  
HC. Heidelberg Catechism  
KJV. King James Version  
NIV. New International Version  
WCF. Westminster Confession of Faith  
WSC. Westminster Shorter Catechism

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## *INTRODUCTION*

### **1. This study guide contains several basic helps for the student:**

#### ***Study Questions***

The study questions at the beginning of each lesson are designed to help members of the class or study group focus on the important elements in the passage at hand. The teacher or leader is encouraged to copy the question pages and hand them out to members prior to meeting together, ideally a week beforehand.

#### ***Answers to the Study Questions***

The answers present the most important points the passage makes. They also contain references to other Bible verses that amplify the answers.

#### ***Study Notes***

Following the answers to the study questions is a section discussing difficult or disputed interpretations, questions that are likely to arise in the Bible student's mind, important doctrines mentioned in the passage, and applications to contemporary life, work, and worship.

### **2. How to use this study guide as teacher or leader.**

Romans is a book with an overall plan and logical structure. It can best be mastered when studied sequentially from beginning to end. Nevertheless, each lesson in the guide covers a natural or logical unit of Paul's thought, and extended portions can be studied independently if time constraints preclude studying the whole letter.

If feasible, hand out copies of the study questions a week before you meet and encourage the members of the class or Bible study to read the passage and to write down the answers in the space provided on the question sheet or on a separate piece of paper before you meet. Based on my own experience as a Bible teacher, I know that some members of a class or Bible study either cannot or will not do that. Encourage it anyway, but don't scold those who don't.

A short review of the previous week's lesson by the teacher or leader is a good way to begin each class meeting. A review refreshes the memory and places the day's lesson in its context in the Book of Romans.

Following the review, the study questions should be the framework for class discussion. The teacher or leader may hand the answer pages to members of the class or study groups, or he or she may choose to use them when answering the questions during class discussion. If the members are not in the habit of doing the lesson before class, you could give them fifteen minutes or so to do that before you begin going over the answers. As teacher or leader, solicit answers to the study questions from members of the class. You may need to gently correct an answer from the group that is off-the-wall or unbiblical. If no one gives an answer equivalent to one given in the answers to the study questions page, read or summarize that answer. Add any personal comments you believe necessary to bring out points of importance or interest. The teacher or leader should not feel obligated to cover all the material in the answers to the study questions.

Last of all, read or summarize such study notes as you think best, and encourage group discussion of the topics the study notes deal with as you think best. As with the answers to the study questions, you may choose to hand copies of the study notes out to the class.

*I. GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL*

**LESSON 1. 1 Romans 1:1-17*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What does Paul say about himself? *v. 1*
2. What does he say about the gospel? *vs. 1-3*
3. What does he say about Jesus Christ? *vs. 3-4*
4. What is Jesus Christ's relationship to Paul? *vs. 4-5*
5. What is Paul's relationship to the Christians in Rome? *vs. 6-10*
6. What are four reasons Paul wants to visit Rome. *vs. 11-15*
7. What is Paul's attitude towards his task? Why does he have this attitude? *vs. 14-16*
8. What is the theme of the gospel? *vs. 16-17*, see also *vs. 2-3*
9. How is the gospel made known to us? *v. 17*
10. How do we receive the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel? *v. 17*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. What does Paul say about himself? v. 1**

Paul says that he is:

- (a) A servant of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated *servant* could be translated as *bondservant* or *slave*.
- (b) Called to be an *apostle*. The word *apostle* comes directly from a Greek word meaning *messenger* or *one under orders*.
- (c) Set apart for the gospel of God.

### **2. What does he say about the gospel? vs. 1-3**

- (a) It is *God's* gospel, not Paul's own message.
- (b) It was promised beforehand by God through his prophets in the Old Testament scriptures.
- (c) The gospel is the good tidings concerning God's Son.

### **3. What does he say about Jesus Christ? vs. 3-4**

- (a) As regards his human nature, Jesus is a descendant of King David.
- (b) As regards his divine nature, he is the Son of God. The proof of his divinity, or God-nature, was his resurrection from the dead.
- (c) Jesus Christ is our Lord. The Greek word translated *Lord* means he to whom a person belongs; one's master, one's God.

### **4. What is Jesus Christ's relationship to Paul? vs. 4-5**

- (a) Jesus Christ is Paul's Lord. (See Acts 9:).
- (b) Paul received grace and apostleship through Jesus Christ. *Grace* is favor or something freely given without respect to the worthiness of the recipient. Apostleship was part of God's grace to Paul. In sending Paul forth as an apostle God favored him with authority and responsibility that he did not deserve.

### **5. What is Paul's relationship to the Christians in Rome? vs. 6-10**

- (a) They, like Paul, were called to belong to Christ.
- (b) Paul and his readers have a common Father and a common Lord.
- (c) He always prays for them.
- (d) He wants to visit them.

### **6. What are four reasons Paul wants to visit Rome. vs. 11-15**

- (a) He wants to impart some spiritual gift to the Christians in Rome to build up and strengthen their faith.
- (b) He wants to receive encouragement from them. He expects his own faith to be strengthened by his visit.
- (c) He expects to reap a spiritual harvest in Rome, that is, he hopes to convert more Gentiles there to Christ.
- (d) He is obligated to all people, all nations. God commissioned him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles everywhere, including Rome.

### **7. What is Paul's attitude towards his task? Why does he have this attitude? vs. 14-16**

- (a) He is eager and unashamed to preach in Rome.
- (b) He is not hesitant, reticent, or at a loss for words when contemplating preaching in proud Rome

because of the power of the gospel: the gospel is the power of God for salvation!

**8. What is the theme of the gospel? vs. 16-17, see also vs. 2-3**

The theme of the gospel is the righteousness of God, which is the power of God for salvation.

**9. How is the gospel made known to us? v. 17**

God has *revealed* the gospel. It is not something we come to know by our own observation, experience, intuition, or discussion. God made it known by his prophets, apostles, and Christ himself. We find their message in the scriptures. God inspired the scriptures such that they are a complete, trustworthy, and error-free record of his revelation. See 2 Timothy 3:15-16.

**10. How do we receive the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel? v. 17**

We make the gospel and all that it promises our own by *faith*, that is, by *believing* what God has said and by *trusting* in Jesus Christ, in whom is found the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel.



## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. Paul.**

The author of this book was the Apostle Paul, a native of the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia (southern Turkey). Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was a Jew by nationality who enjoyed the legal status of Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:26-28). He had been brought up a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5, Philippians 3:4-6) and had studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Like other rabbis of his time, Paul had learned a secular trade to support himself; he was a tent maker, or possibly a leather worker (Acts 18:1-3).

Saul the Pharisee had been a fierce enemy of the followers of Christ (Acts 26:9-11). But one day, while traveling to Damascus to initiate a persecution of the Christians there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision (Acts 9:1-9). Saul was immediately converted to Christ; three days later he was baptized in Damascus.

Looking back on his life without Christ, Paul concluded that everything he had once taken pride in - his Hebrew ancestry, circumcision, integrity or righteousness as measured by the Law of Moses - was, spiritually speaking, garbage (Philippians 3:8-11). He no longer considered those things to be his righteousness or the basis of his acceptance by God. Instead, he trusted that God had provided a divine righteousness for him in Jesus Christ. This perfect righteousness, appropriated personally through faith in Christ, was the subject of the gospel that Paul preached for the rest of his life. It is this righteousness which Paul expounds in the Book of Romans.

When Paul appeared to Ananias, the disciple who baptized him in Damascus, the Lord declared that he had chosen Paul to preach to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Within days of his conversion Paul was preaching Christ with the same zeal he had formerly employed against the Lord, using his knowledge of the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 9:19-20). From that time on Paul was engaged in controversy with his fellow Jews whenever and wherever he preached Christ.

Although we often think of Paul as the great apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2), he had been chosen to preach Christ to all people, Jews as well as Gentiles (Acts 9:15). When Paul entered a new town he normally would preach first in the synagogue to his fellow Jews, turning to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected his message (e.g., see Acts 13:44-48). He never gave up trying to convert his own people (Acts 28:17-30). Paul loved them and was anguished over their rejection of Christ (Romans 9:1-3, 10:1).

We don't know when Paul first realized that his calling would take him ultimately to Rome. He made three evangelizing journeys before his trip to Rome; each journey took him further westward from Palestine and closer to Rome. By the middle of his third journey, if not before, Paul knew he would eventually reach the capital of the empire (Acts 19:21).

It was towards the end of his third journey, while he spent three months in Corinth, that Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome. In it he expresses his intention to journey on to Spain after visiting Rome, taking the word of Christ to the westernmost outpost of the empire.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome. According to tradition he was martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero several years later. We don't know if he ever succeeded in reaching Spain.

### **2. Rome in Paul's day.**

The Roman Empire in Paul's day included nearly all the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea as well as Gaul (France, Belgium, and the Netherlands) and Germany west of the Rhine River. Roman military power had made the empire secure from foreign invaders and had established peace, order, and safety - the *Pax Romana* - within its borders. Commerce between Rome and the provinces was

active and unhindered. Subject peoples of many races and languages lived in Rome itself. Many were slaves, but many also were free men and women. Rome was a cosmopolitan city, the hub of a world empire.

The Romans allowed their non-Roman subjects a good deal of autonomy in matters of local government, custom, and religion. Citizens of Rome, however, were subject to Roman law and assured of Roman justice wherever they lived. When Paul finally traveled to Rome it was as a prisoner who had been accused of crime by Jewish officials in Palestine and who had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal directly to Caesar (Acts 25:9-12). Although some Roman officials may have been corrupt (Acts 24:24-27), and the protection of Roman law extended only to Roman citizens, on the whole Rome took pains to ensure justice for all. Rome's legal system is still the basis of jurisprudence in many Western European nations today.

In contrast to Roman law, Roman morality and religion were decaying. Educated Romans did not believe in the old gods anymore, even though many maintained the traditional norms and ceremonies of their fathers. Some Romans had turned from their traditional religion to religions that had entered from the East. By Paul's time the so-called *mystery religions* of Greek origin had established a foothold in Rome. The cult of Isis and Osiris had been introduced from Egypt, and the worship of Mithras had found its way to Rome from Persia. The Jews were also engaged in missionary activity (Matthew 25:15), and a few Romans had turned to Judaism (Luke 7:5; Acts 10:1-2).

In the time of the Roman republic, more than two hundred years earlier, Romans had been proud of their moral virtues. They had prized chastity, bravery, self-sacrifice, simplicity, and charitable treatment of the vanquished. But by Paul's day the ancient virtues had been replaced in practice by sexual vice, infidelity, personal ambition and selfishness, overindulgence, and the pursuit of luxury. Roman morals had become corrupt; thoughtful Romans themselves bewailed the fact. Very likely those Romans who had converted to Judaism had been attracted by the worship of one holy God and the high moral code of the Law of Moses.

Consider the parallels between the Roman Empire of Paul's day and America today: decades of political stability, flourishing world trade, an emphasis on justice for all (at least all citizens), a decline of traditional religion and an invasion of eastern religions, moral corruption - and the hunger of a few for spiritual reality. We need Paul's gospel now as much as Rome did then.

### ***3. The church in Rome.***

The Book of Acts is silent regarding the origins of the church in Rome. It records instances in which the gospel made a notable advance into a new ethnic group or geographical region through the ministry of the apostles, but it does not do so in the case of Rome. This suggests that the church in Rome may have grown out of the spontaneous activity of ordinary Christians rather than out of organized missionary activity. Jews, Greeks, and others who had been converted in the provinces and had taken up residence in Rome, natives of Rome who had been converted while traveling in the eastern Mediterranean, and local converts of such believers would have gathered together for prayer, teaching, mutual comfort and exhortation, and the breaking of bread, as did Christians elsewhere (Acts 2:46-47).

Whatever its origin, the church in Rome was well established by the time Paul wrote Romans (1:8). He did not write his letter primarily to convert its recipients to Christ, but rather to deepen their understanding of the faith. Moreover, he expected that they had grown in the grace of God to the point where they would strengthen his own faith as well (1:11-12). As we study Romans we find that Paul takes certain basic truths of the faith as givens - the trinitarian nature of God, historical facts of Jesus' life and death, the contents of the Old Testament. He assumes the Romans know these and does not expound them at length. He endeavors instead to show all aspects of the truth that "the just shall live by faith" (1:17).

The church in Rome contained believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Paul explicitly declares some Christians in Rome to be Gentiles (1:23). He also refers to some as brothers who know the law, that is, the Law of Moses. (7:1); most likely they were Jewish Christians. Priscilla and Aquila, whom he greets by name (16:3) were Jews (Acts 18:2). The presence of both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church in Rome is reflected in Paul's emphasis that both Jews and Gentiles are guilty sinners before God (3:9-23), that there is but one God with one way of salvation for all people (3:29-30, 4:16-17), and that God's eternal plan involves both Jews and Gentiles (11:11-32).

#### ***4. The human and divine natures of Jesus.***

Paul refers briefly to the human and divine natures of Jesus in 1:3-4. He does not expound on the two natures of Christ at length because he is writing to believers who know these truths. Nevertheless, we do well to review these truths at the beginning of our study because they constitute part of the unexpressed background of Romans.

As far as his human ancestry is concerned, Jesus was a descendant of King David. This fact would have been significant to Jews. God had promised David, the second and greatest king of Israel, that one of his descendants would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. God would love David's son (descendant) so much that he would be his Father forever and the king would be his Son (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2). Jews looked forward to the coming of this *Messiah* (*Christos* in the Greek, i.e., Christ). Anyone who claimed to be the Christ would have to be a descendant of David. Jesus met the human qualification.

Jesus was also the divine Son of God. The term *Son of God* meant more than the Jews realized when they read prophecies regarding the Messiah as God's Son. They believed God was speaking metaphorically or figuratively in such passages. In fact, he was speaking literally: the Christ is divine as well as human. He is the eternal Son, the second person in the triune Godhead. The Jewish leaders became enraged when Jesus asserted his divine nature; they believed he was guilty of blasphemy (John 2:19-22). But the resurrection was a powerful proof of Jesus' deity (v. 4). Jesus had predicted his resurrection as a witness that he was who he claimed to be, the Christ, the divine Son of the Father (John 2:19-22).

By virtue of both his descent from David and his deity, Jesus was Lord. The Greek word *kurios*, which means *lord*, had divine implications as well as secular meaning in the Roman world of Paul's day (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). Christians who were ordered to swear allegiance to Caesar as Lord knew that more was involved than acknowledging the political lordship of Caesar. Many Christians refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord because they had only one divine Lord, Jesus Christ. Their refusal brought waves of official persecution on believers for the first two centuries of the Christian era.

#### ***5. The righteousness of God.***

Verse 17 states the theme of Romans: the righteousness of God. *The righteousness of God* refers to the righteousness God provides in Christ for sinful humankind. It also refers to the righteousness of God's character and actions. Paul proclaims the good news that God has provided a righteousness for us who have none of our own, either by virtue of our nature or our good deeds. He also defends the justice of God's dealings with humankind and displays the righteousness of God's character.

In Romans the English words *righteousness* and *justice* are translations of the same Greek word. Similarly, the English words *righteous* and *just* are translations of a single Greek word. Sometimes a passage can be understood better by substituting *just* for *righteous* (or vice versa), or by substituting *justice* for *righteousness*.

#### ***6. "by faith to faith" (1:17).***

The Greek of verse 17 is more ambiguous than the English of the ESV, and translators and

commentators have understood this phrase in several ways.

The Greek word translated *faith* can also mean *faithfulness*. Thus 1:17 could be translated to indicate that God, in faithfulness to his covenant promise, has revealed a righteousness to men, to be received by faith. We shall see that Paul is very zealous to defend the faithfulness of God in Romans (e.g., see 3:3, 11:1, 11:29).

Alternatively, the verse could mean that the Christian life begins when a sinner puts his faith in Christ, and then continues to live a life of faith and trust in Christ as long as he lives.

Either interpretation expresses biblical truth. Nevertheless, the interpretation adopted by the ESV (and nearly all other English translations) probably should be preferred here on the strength of its agreement with the phrase that follows, “the righteous shall live by faith,” a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. That phrase has a double meaning. The Greek word order is “the righteous by faith shall live.” The words *by faith* can be taken with the words that precede them to indicate that those who are righteous by faith shall gain life. Alternatively, *by faith* can be taken by the words that follow to indicate that those who are righteous live their lives by faith or trust in God. Christian faith has both a beginning aspect and a continuing one. Our righteousness in Christ is truly “by faith to faith” in both senses.

## LESSON 2. Romans 1:18-2:16

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What do we need to be saved from? *vs. 1:18, 32.*
  
2. What is the cause of God's wrath against humankind? *vs. 1:18-21*
  
3. How has God revealed himself? Has he revealed himself to all people? What has he revealed about himself? *vs. 1:19-20*
  
4. How ought we to respond to God's revelation of himself? How have people responded? *vs. 1:21-23*
  
5. What has God done to punish people for rejecting him? *vs. 1:21-31*
  
6. Has God's giving humankind over to sin and depravity served to bring them to repentance? Was it intended to do so? *v. 1:31*
  
7. Some think they will escape the condemnation falling on others. On what grounds do they deceive themselves? *vs. 2:1-4*
  
8. Is the expression of God's wrath against sinful humanity limited to the things mentioned? 1:24-32? What more is there to the wrath of God? *v. 2:5*
  
9. How would you summarize God's principles of judgment? *vs. 2:2, 5-11*
  
10. On what basis will God judge those who never knew the Law of Moses? *vs. 2:12-15*

11. Will Jews (or Christians) escape condemnation just because they have God's Word and agree with the law of God found in it? *vs. 2:1-3, 13*

12. How much does God know of what we do, of what we think in our hearts? *v. 2:16*

13. Is the message of judgment a preparation for the gospel or part of the gospel? *v. 2:16*

**ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS****1. What do we need to be saved from? vs. 1:18, 32**

- (a) We need to be saved from the wrath of God.
- (b) We need to be saved from death, which is the penalty we deserve for our sins.

**2. What is the cause of God's wrath against humankind? vs. 1:18, 21**

The cause of God's wrath is the wickedness and godlessness of men; in particular, their conscious suppression of the truth that God exists, is powerful and glorious, and is worthy of praise.

**3. How has God revealed himself? Has he revealed himself to all people? What has he revealed about himself? vs. 1:19-20**

- (a) God reveals himself in and through creation.
- (b) He reveals himself to all humanity, for the created world is present to all.
- (c) In creation God reveals his eternal power and divine nature, that is, his deity, his Godhead.

**4. How ought one to respond to God's revelation of himself? How have people responded? vs. 1:21-23**

(a) People ought to glorify God and thank him for his person and for his goodness in creating such a wonderful world.

(b) Our response to God's revelation of himself in creation has been to refuse to glorify God or to thank him. We have instead glorified and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator.

**5. What has God done to punish man for rejecting him? vs. 1:21-31**

God has given humankind over to (a) sinful desires (1:24), (b) unnatural, shameful lusts and practices (1:26), (c) a depraved mind (1:28), and (d) all sorts of wicked practices (1:29-30).

**6. Has God's giving humankind over to sin and depravity served to bring them to repentance? Was it intended to do so? v. 1:31**

(a) God's action in giving men over to their sins and the hurtful consequences of them has not brought them to repentance.

(b) This passage does not indicate that the suffering, hardship, and heartbreak resulting from a life of sin in the midst of a sinful people were intended to bring people to repentance. Rather, these verses indicate that God's hardening of people in their sin is punishment - an expression of his wrath.

**7. Some think they will escape the condemnation falling on others. On what grounds do they deceive themselves? vs. 2:1-4**

Some people think they will escape judgment because they agree that God should condemn sin - in others. Others misinterpret his patience toward humankind by rashly concluding that he never intends to punish the world.

**8. Is the expression of God's wrath against sinful humanity limited to the things mentioned? 1:24-32? What more is there to the wrath of God? v. 2:5**

There is more to the expression of God's wrath than his hardening people in their sin in this present life. God has a day of judgment awaiting the wicked at the end of this present evil age.

**9. How would you summarize God's principles of judgment? vs. 2:2, 5-11**

- (a) God's judgment *rightly* falls upon our race. We deserve his judgment.
- (b) His judgment is *righteous* and *just*. All will get what they deserves, no more, no less.
- (c) God will reward or punish each person *according to what he has done*, that is, *according to his works*.

That means:

(1) He will give eternal life, honor, glory, and peace to everyone who continues to do good (2:7).

(2) He will subject the disobedient, wicked, and selfish to wrath, fury, tribulation, and distress (2:8-9).

(d) God's judgment is *impartial*. He will judge everyone, Jew and Gentile, by the same standard. He shows no favoritism (2:11).

**10. On what basis will God judge those who never knew the Law of Moses? vs. 2:12-15**

They will be judged on the basis of the law of God written on their hearts. The essence of his law is written on every person's heart. This truth is evidenced by the fact that our conscience warns us when we are doing wrong and justifies and reassures us when we are doing right. Therefore, ignorance of the written law of God in the Scripture is no excuse.

**11. Will Jews (or Christians) escape condemnation just because they have God's Word and agree with the law of God found in it? vs. 2:1-3, 13**

Mere possession of the Law of Moses does not save. It is not enough to *know* the law of God. It is not even enough to *agree* with it in one's mind. To escape condemnation one must *obey* it consistently and faithfully.

**12. How much does God know of what we do, of what we think in our hearts? v. 2:16**

God knows everything we do, say, and think; he knows the secrets of our lives. He will call us to account for our inner thoughts, motives, and desires as well as for our deeds (Matthew 5:28).

**13. Is the message of judgment a preparation for the gospel or part of the gospel? v. 2:16**

The doctrine of present and future judgment is not simply a preparation for the gospel, but part of the gospel message we are to preach (John 16:7-11, especially v. 11).



## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. Our need of the gospel.**

Paul states the theme of Romans in 1:16-17, declaring that the gospel is God's power for salvation because the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. In the verses immediately following he sets out to prove that all *need* the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. Only when men and women realize that they are in eternal danger because of their sins will they desire righteousness. And only when they recognize that they lack any personal righteousness or means of producing a righteousness of their own will they welcome a righteousness provided for them by God. The passages under study in this lesson and the next are devoted to proving that all people are sinners, lacking righteousness, and under the just condemnation of God.

### **2. The wrath of God.**

The gospel reveals the wrath of God as well as his righteousness. The word *wrath* denotes both the hot anger God feels toward sin and the sinner and also the punishment he inflicts on sinners, that is, it denotes both the attitude and the action of God towards sin and those who practice it.

God's wrath has both present and future aspects. He expresses his wrath in the present age by hardening people in their depravity (1:24-31). He will express his wrath in the age to come as eternal punishment, to be unveiled on the Day of Judgment (2:5).

God's wrath is *revealed* (literally, *uncovered* or *laid bare*) from heaven. Apart from the active, gracious revelation of God, people are too blind to see that their present depravity and degradation are punishment from God (see study note 4). They may attribute the sorry moral state of the human race to excessive affluence, lack of parental discipline, lenient courts, ignorance, or other human or environmental causes, but they do not recognize it as punishment inflicted by an angry God.

### **3. Natural revelation.**

The created world reveals God clearly enough that all people can perceive his power and divine nature and know their duty to worship him. (Psalm 19:1-4; Acts 14:15-17 and 17:24-28). Therefore, when they do not acknowledge and worship their Creator, they are without excuse. The fact that many no longer see the truth of God in the order and beauty of the natural world witnesses to the depravity of the human mind.

Verses 18-25 describe a worldwide historical apostasy from the true God after the fall. (Let us be clear that Paul is not redefining the fall of Adam and Eve here.) Noah's descendants turned creation on its head by worshiping the things God created rather than the One who created them. In 1:23-25 Paul refers to the idol worship of his own day, something modern Western man finds amusing. But is scientific, rational Western man any closer to recognizing the truth of God revealed in the created world? Many contemporary scientists, those who know nature best, deny the existence of God altogether. Is atheism any better than idolatry? Moreover, in some intellectual circles atheism is losing ground to *pantheism*, the belief that all life is in some sense infused with divinity. Pantheistic religions, especially Eastern religions, are gaining Western converts. And there is a noticeable trend among the environmentally aware to reverence, even deify, the earth and life itself.

### **4. "God gave them up."**

Three times in Romans 1 we read that "God gave them up" (vs. 24, 26, 28). In giving the human race up to the sin and degradation described in 1:24-32, God hardens people and withholds grace from them. He does not make men evil or depraved - God forbid such a thought! - but he hardens them and leaves them in the sin they have willingly chosen for themselves.

First, in vs. 24-25 Paul mentions sexual impurity associated with idolatry.. The Old Testament

frequently likens idolatry to sexual impurity (Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea 2). Paul goes further and asserts that idolatry and sexual impurity are associated in the same persons. Those who despise fidelity to the true God are not likely to prize fidelity to their spouses, and those who degrade themselves by bowing down to images of beasts will not scruple to defile themselves physically.

Secondly, in vs. 26-27 Paul states that God gave them up to homosexual vice. The Old Testament condemns homosexuality in no uncertain terms (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13). In the days of the Roman republic the Romans despised homosexuality, thinking of it as a Greek perversion. But homosexuality had been on the increase in Rome for some time when Paul wrote his letter. Paul knows that the majority of men and women, sinners though they be, agree that homosexuality is an unnatural, abhorrent perversion. His point is that giving people up to homosexuality is a *condign* (appropriate, fitting) punishment: exchanging the true God for a false one is a perversion just like choosing a sexual partner of one's own sex. Both are perversions of the created order.

Today, homosexuals flaunt their perversion openly in Western society. Most men and women are still disgusted with open homosexuality even if they have grown used to it. They should not be surprised. Open perversion is nothing new; it appears whenever a godless society is given enough time to bring its wickedness to full fruition.

Thirdly, in v. 28 Paul states that God gave men over to a depraved mind. Such a mind disdains God and leads the sinner into all kinds of evil practices. Paul fully expects the average pagan to agree that the practices listed in vs. 29-32 are wicked. His point is that rejection of God lies at the root of all evil, social as well as personal. The Greeks and Romans had never seen much connection between religion and morality, nor do some people today. Does not this failure to associate *cause* (rejection of the true God) and *effect* (evil) constitute further proof that God gave the human race up to a depraved mind?

The fact that God hardens us as punishment for our sins leads to the inescapable conclusion that, left to ourselves, we could not abandon our sins even if we wanted to. Of course, men and women untouched by the grace of God do not want to, for God has given our race over to a mind that loves sinning. The natural mind loves sin so much that we enjoy the sins of others almost as much as we enjoy our own sins (v. 32). The Romans loved the carnage of the gladiatorial circuses. Today we vicariously enjoy the violence, greed, and sexual impurity portrayed on television, film, and video games; we even love to watch and read about murder, war, physical assault, and other sins that could claim *us* as victims some day. Humankind's love of sin is *nihilistic*: man seeks his own destruction.

### ***5. Paul gets personal.***

Paul's indictment of the human race in 1:18-32 is general. In chapter 2 he gets personal. It is human nature to condemn others and excuse ourselves, but Paul will have none of that. He desires every man and woman to seek Christ, but he knows that each of us must experience a personal sense of sin and guilt before we are willing to turn to God. Paul knows that many will agree with what he said in chapter 1. He suddenly turns on them at the beginning of chapter 2, warning them that they will be judged by the same standards they confess to be appropriate for judging others. Jesus taught the same truth (Matthew 7:1-2).

### ***6. The judgment of God.***

Paul states three key truths regarding the Day of Judgment in vs. 2:1-16. He aims not merely to inform. Paul's intention is to show that God's principles of judgment guarantee that every living soul will be condemned apart from the mercy of Christ.

(a) The first truth is simply that the judgment of God is bound to come sooner or later. God is patient with the human race so that all have the opportunity to repent and turn to him, but his patience is not without end. Eventually we must all stand before God's judgment seat. When people

count on his patience as an excuse to keep on sinning they store up even more wrath for themselves.

(b) The second truth about the final judgment is that God shows no partiality. Every individual will undergo judgment, and all will be judged by the same standard. God will exempt no one from judgment, nor will he judge some by different rules than others.

This truth was not recognized by Paul's fellow Jews. They believed God would deal more leniently with them than with the Gentiles because they were God's chosen people. Paul addresses his fellow Jews in particular in 2:16-3:19 (see Lesson 3) and cuts out from under them all grounds for self-deception.

(c) Thirdly, the standard of judgment will be the law of God. He will pay each one according to what he or she has done. If a person's works are those commanded by the law, that person will be rewarded. If the works are those forbidden by the law, or if that person has not done the things the law commands to be done, he or she will suffer God's wrath. Paul adds in 2:16 that God will judge our secrets. He will call us to account for the hidden things of our hearts, the sins we would commit if we had the means, opportunity, or daring. Jesus taught the same truth (Matthew 5:22, 28; Mark 7:20-23).

The Bible student who already knows Paul's doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law (see 3:20-21; see also Lessons 3 and 4) may question whether anyone will actually receive a reward for good works on the day of judgment. Is Paul writing hypothetically in 2:7 and 2:10? Not at all. Many will be rewarded for their good works. Indeed, Paul himself expects a heavenly reward for faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:5-14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). However, the works that God will reward on that day are not the basis of one's salvation; rather, they are the fruit of God's work in the lives of saved sinners (Philippians 2:13).

Later in Romans Paul makes several truths clear:

(a) the unconverted man cannot please God with works, since his best actions stem from his sinful nature (8:8).

(b) God saves us with the intention of working righteousness in our lives (8:3-4).

(c) the good deeds that God will reward at the final judgment are his works in us (8:29-30). We sometimes fail to understand that *we too will stand before the judgment seat of Christ*, where our works will be judged. There we will receive rewards or suffer loss (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 4:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Many religious people accept the idea that God will reward their good deeds; a smaller number that he also will punish people for the evil they have done. They err primarily in overestimating the quality and quantity of their good works and in grossly underestimating the number and hatefulness of their sins in God's sight. In chapter 3 Paul will drive home the hard truth that everyone deserves condemnation for his or her works.

## **7. The Law of God.**

To be judged according to works means to have one's works compared with the works God commands and forbids in his law. As used by Paul, the word *law* usually refers to the Law of Moses, i.e., the Ten Commandments plus the other statutes and ordinances God delivered to Moses for his covenant people Israel.

The Gentiles did not possess the written law of God (Deuteronomy 4:8). How can God judge them fairly by a law they never knew? This question is a favorite of unbelievers who would deny God's right to judge the world. Our reply must be Paul's reply: the essence of God's law is written in the hearts of all, so that all are without excuse when they sin.

Paul declares that nature shows all men and women that he exists, that they have a duty to worship and glorify the true God, and that all know the essence of what is commanded and forbidden in the Ten Commandments, or the moral law (compare 1:18-32 with Exodus 20:1-7). People are without

excuse when they sin whether or not they have known the scriptures. God will compare their works with the essence of the law written in their hearts - and they will be condemned.

Possession of the written law is a great blessing. The heart of man is depraved and may repress or distort the truth of God. The conscience of a man or woman may be seared so badly that it has no feeling and ceases to warn against sin (1 Timothy 4:2). But the written Law is a constant, uncorrupt statement of what God requires. Those who have it know without doubt what God commands and forbids. Even so, possession of the written Law does not save. God will judge people on the basis of what they do or fail to do, not on what they know or do not know.

### LESSON 3. Romans 2:17-3:20

#### *STUDY QUESTIONS*

1. On what grounds did some Jews think they would obtain God's approval and escape his judgment?  
*vs. 2:17-27*
  
2. Where did they go wrong in their thinking? *vs. 2:17-27*
  
3. In vs. 1, 3, 5, and 7 of chapter 3 various objections are raised against Paul's charge that all people, Jews as well as Gentiles, stand condemned by God. Paraphrase those objections in your own words.
  - v. 1
  - v. 3
  - v. 5
  - v.7
  
4. In vs. 2, 4, 6, and 8 of chapter 3 Paul answers those objections. Paraphrase those answers in your own words.
  - v. 2
  - v. 4
  - v. 6
  - v. 8
  
5. In 3:10-18 Paul quotes several Old Testament passages: Psalm 14:1-2, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, and Psalm 36:1. What is his purpose in quoting these verses?
  
6. What do Jews and Gentiles have in common? *v. 3:19*
  
7. What does the Law of Moses produce? *v. 3:20*

## ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS

**1. On what grounds did some Jews think they would obtain God's approval and escape his judgment? vs. 2:17-27**

- (a) They were *Jews*, God's own special people (2:17).
- (b) They relied on the law (2:17).
- (c) They boasted in God (2:17; see also Psalm 96:5).
- (d) They both knew and approved of God's will as revealed in the law, (2:18).
- (e) They had been circumcised. Circumcision was prescribed by God as a sign of the *covenant* God had made with Abraham and his descendants - he to be their God and they to be his people forever (*covenant*: a pact, agreement, or contractual relationship). See Genesis 17:9-14.

**2. Where did they go wrong in their thinking? vs. 2:17-27**

- (a) They did the very things they condemned in others, things they admitted deserved punishment.
- (b) They thought the physical act of circumcision automatically made them God's people regardless of their disobedience to the law and covenant.

**3. In vs. 1, 3, 5, and 7 of chapter 3 various objections are raised against Paul's charge that all people, Jews as well as Gentiles, stand condemned by God. Paraphrase those objections in your own words.**

- (a) Verse 1: Surely there is some value in being a circumcised Jew instead of a Gentile! What is that value, if not exemption from judgment?
- (b) Verse 3: God is obligated to be faithful to his promises to us even if we are unfaithful to him.
- (c) Verse 5: Since God's righteousness stands out all the more gloriously against the dark background of our wickedness, it would not be just of him to inflict wrath on us.
- (d) Verse 7: God's truthfulness is shown to be all the more glorious by my false character and lies, so why does he condemn me? One might even say that it is necessary for me to do evil for his goodness to be revealed in its fullness!

**4. In vs. 2, 4, 6, and 8 of chapter 3 Paul answers those objections. Paraphrase those answers in your own words.**

- (a) Verse 2: There is indeed much value in being a Jew. The chief benefit is that Jews possess the written word of God - but this makes their sinful conduct all the more reprehensible.
- (b) Verse 4: Of course God must prove faithful and true, even if that means that every human being proves to be false! But this also means that God will always prevail and man will always be found wrong whenever God and man enter into judgment.
- (c) Verse 6: Since the Jew has already agreed that it is just of God to judge the *world*, i.e., the Gentiles (2:1), this argument cannot be sound. God could not judge the Gentiles if this objection were valid. But if the argument does not hold for Gentiles, it cannot hold for Jews either, since it does not appeal to a difference between Jews and Gentiles.
- (d) Verse 8: This argument leads logically to the absurd conclusion that we should *seek* to do evil so that good will result. Paul does not dignify this argument with a reply. He pronounces the one who would dare advance such a proposition worthy of condemnation without further ado.

**5. In 3:10-18 Paul quotes several Old Testament passages: Psalm 14:1-2, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, and Psalm 36:1. What is his purpose in quoting these verses?**

These verses are addressed to Jews and they describe Jews. Paul has already declared the Gentile world

to be under condemnation. Now he shows his own people to be equally guilty. He wants to silence every mouth that would dare justify itself before God.

**6. What do Jews and Gentiles have in common? v. 3:19**

All are guilty and exposed to the judgment of God.

**7. What does the Law of Moses produce? v. 3:20**

The Law of Moses does not produce righteousness; rather, it produces personal consciousness of sin.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. God's favorites.**

The Jews resisted the truth that they needed salvation as much as the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Had not God chosen Israel to be his own special people (Deuteronomy 7:6, 10:14-15)? Had God not given the Jews his law (Deuteronomy 4:7-8)? And had they not received the rite of circumcision as a sign of their special relationship to God? Indeed, Jesus himself had affirmed that salvation belongs to the Jews.

The Jews' confidence that they were and forever would remain God's favorites was strengthened when they reflected on their history. They had often been unfaithful to the Lord; they had fallen into grievous sin and idolatry time and time again. God had punished them for their sins; he had even sent them into exile in Assyria and Babylonia. Yet he had remained faithful to his covenant promises and had restored them to their land.

By the time Paul wrote this letter, Israel had forsaken idolatry for good. The Jews positively gloried in the Law of Moses. They were meticulous in fulfilling the most minute precepts of the law, even giving tithes of the herbs that grew in their gardens (Matthew 22:23). If God had loved them before, surely he loved them all the more now! Paul's fellow Jews did not fear eternal wrath; they felt no need to be saved in any spiritual sense.

Like the Jews of Paul's day, many in the so-called Christian world today view themselves as God's favorites. God has blessed the Western democracies with freedom and prosperity not enjoyed by most other nations. The Christian heritage of these countries is widely acknowledged by their citizens (and even by many atheists!) to be the foundation of their freedom and prosperity.

Although secularism has taken deep root in the West, many still consider themselves to be Christians, even though they know little and believe less of the gospel. As the Jews considered their circumcision to be evidence of their membership in God's people, some today point to their baptism as proof that they are members of the church of God. Also, just as the Jews reasoned that they were God's people because they possessed his Word, some today consider themselves Christians because they have his Word in the Bible.

Those who live in the "Christian" West too often view their blessings and their religious activity or religious affiliation as proofs that they are the apple of God's eye. Like the Jews who contended with Paul, they resist the truth that everyone of us *personally* is a condemned sinner in need of salvation, every bit as much as a "godless" communist or a third-world "heathen."

### **2. Objections and replies.**

Paul seeks to shatter the complacency of his fellow Jews by reiterating the truth that they are under condemnation because they break the very law they acknowledge to be perfect and just (2:21-22). In taking this approach he follows the example of Jesus when he contended with the self-righteous Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-36; Luke 11:29-52). Again and again Paul hammers home the truth that God will judge all people by the same standard, the deeds they actually do, not the deeds they merely approve (2:25-29). God does not accept a person because he or she has joined a church, undergone some religious rite, or owns a copy of his Word.

In 3:1-18 Paul takes up and disposes of the few remaining objections likely to be raised by his fellow Jews. *None of these objections denies the protestor's guilt!* Reread the answers to study questions 3 and 4 and you will observe that in each case, Paul's objector is, in one way or another, throwing himself on the mercy of the court.

### **3. The testimony of Scripture.**

Paul's closing argument as God's prosecuting attorney is drawn from the Old Testament. He quotes a



number of passages - he could have added many more - to show the universality of sin. *None* is righteous; *none* seeks God; *all* have turned aside out of God's way; *no one* does good. These words were addressed to Jews! God himself has declared *all* to be sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike. The law in which Israel gloried was actually Israel's undoing, for it proved Jews to be sinners just like the rest of the human race.

Everyone today who professes to accept the Bible as the Word of God should likewise confess that the Word declares him or her to be a sinner. In the face of such divine testimony, neither Jew nor Gentile can open the mouth in further defense. All must stand naked and mute at the judgment seat of God.

We must believe that everyone is as bad as the scriptures quoted by Paul declare. We must believe that all today are as much under the power and domination of sin as were the men and women of Paul's day. Yes, some people are more wicked than others, but if we think Paul is describing only the worst of humanity we miss his point entirely. Comparing one human being to another, we may judge some more upright than others, but in the sight of God even the best lack any redeeming qualities. If we find this hard to swallow, the problem lies in our faulty, sinful viewpoint and not in the Word of God (Isaiah 55:6-9, especially vs. 8-9)

All of the above is true apart from Christ. But, beginning in 3:21 (next lesson) we see another way to be righteous.

**LESSON 4. Romans 3:21-31*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What kind of righteousness can never be ours? *v. 21*
2. What kind of righteousness can we have? *vs. 21-22*
3. How and when was the righteousness of God first *made known* to mankind? *v. 21*
4. How has this righteousness of God been *made available* to mankind? *v. 22*
5. How do we make this righteousness of God our own? *v. 22*
6. For whom is this righteousness of God intended? *vs. 22-23*
7. Verses 24-25 describe God's act of providing a divine righteousness for mankind. In your own words, define these characteristics of his work for us.
  - a. *justified*
  - b. *by his grace*
  - c. *redemption*
  - d. *propitiation*
  - e. *by his blood*

8. How did God's act of providing Jesus Christ for us show his righteousness at the present time? vs. 25-26

9. Paul makes several assertions about the gospel in vs. 27-31 which he has already proved or will prove later. What are those assertions?

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. What kind of righteousness can never be ours? v. 21**

We can never have a righteousness based on our own obedience to the law.

### **2. What kind of righteousness can we have? vs. 21-22**

We can have the righteousness of God!

### **3. How and when was the righteousness of God first *made known* to mankind? v. 21**

The righteousness of God was first made known in the law and the prophets, i.e., in the Old Testament.

### **4. How has this righteousness of God been *made available* to mankind? v. 22**

God's righteousness is found in Jesus Christ.

### **5. How do we make this righteousness of God our own? v. 22**

We make Christ and his righteousness ours through faith in him.

### **6. For whom is this righteousness of God intended? vs. 22-23**

God's righteousness in Christ is intended for the world, that is, for Jews and Gentiles alike, since all have sinned and have need of it.

### **7. Verses 24-25 describe God's act of providing a divine righteousness for mankind. In your own words, define these characteristics of his work for us.**

#### **a. justified**

To be justified is to be acquitted of guilt and declared legally blameless. Justification is God's verdict that we are upright and righteous. Those who have been justified are entitled to all the blessings of the upright.

#### **b. by his grace**

God's grace is his loving favor and goodness towards mankind, the loving expression of his good will. God was under no necessity to be gracious to us: we do not deserve his favor because of anything we are or have done. Nor was he compelled to be gracious because of his divine nature. God's grace is *sovereign grace*; it is entirely a matter of his will that he sent his Son to redeem us.

#### **c. redemption**

In the most general sense *redemption* is the act of purchasing or buying something or someone for one's self. In the Old Testament the term is used of the purchase of land in which one has hereditary interest (Leviticus 25:24-32, Ruth 4:3-6); it also refers to the ransom of an animal or person from death, slavery, or oppression (Exodus 6:6, 13:13, 21:8; Leviticus 27:13; Psalms 25:22, 77:5, 130:8; Isaiah 43:1, 52:3; Jeremiah 31:11). In the New Testament redemption refers to God's act of purchasing our freedom from slavery to sin and death, the blood of Christ being the price of our lives (John 8:34-36).

#### **d. propitiation**

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *propitiation* is the act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something. In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement the high priest offered the sacrifice prescribed in the law of Moses to propitiate God's wrath because of the sins of people. That sacrifice was a *type*, or foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which

regained the favor of God for us. See the next note, *by his blood*.

**e. by his blood**

The sacrifice that propitiated the wrath of God (see note above) was the blood of Jesus Christ. He offered his own body and blood for our sins.

**8. How did God's act of providing Jesus Christ for us show his righteousness at the present time? vs 25-26 vs. 3:1-2**

God does not fully punish the sins of men in this life; indeed, some people go to their graves apparently suffering no punishment for their sins. Christ has not yet brought this age to a close by coming in his glory to judge the world. Some people think God's patience and mercy indicate that he is indifferent to sin and that he lacks any intention of punishing man's rebellion and evil. They don't believe he will keep his promise to punish all disobedience (2 Peter 3:3-4; Acts 17:29-31). By offering and accepting his own Son as the sacrifice for our sins, God showed he is righteous: the penalty for sin had to be paid, and it was paid..

**9. Paul makes several assertions about the gospel in vs. 27-31 which he has already proved or will prove later. What are those assertions?**

Paul affirms that:

- (a) No one can boast of his or her obedience to the law, that is, of the righteousness of his or her own works (Philippians 3:3-7).
- (b) A man or woman is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law.
- (c) There is but one God and so but one way of salvation for all humankind.
- (d) The gospel actually establishes the validity of the law. The penalty had to be paid. (1 John 2:7-8).

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. “*But now...*” (3:21).

Until the appearance of Jesus Christ, the history of humankind was a hopeless story of sin, condemnation, and death. Neither Jew nor Gentile had the power to attain a righteousness worthy of God’s verdict of acquittal and justification on the day of judgment. *But now*, “when the time had fully come” (Galatians 4:4), God sent his Son into the world in human flesh to provide his own righteousness for our condemned race. *In Christ* there is a righteousness of God and the hope of eternal life for mankind. From 3:21 on Paul’s message is truly *gospel*, good news!

### 2. “*apart from law*”.

Paul has already shown that none of us is acceptable to God by virtue of obedience to the law, for we all are lawbreakers, even those who do not have the written law of God (2:12-15 and 21-25, 3:19-20). He now announces a righteousness for us not based on personal obedience to the law, a righteousness “apart from law,” the righteousness of Christ.

The phrase, “apart from law” does not mean that the righteousness of Christ was unrelated to *his* keeping of the law, only that it is not based on *our* personal obedience to the law. Christ’s righteousness for us consists precisely in *his* obedience to the law of God, both in his living a life perfectly in agreement with the law’s demands (his *active righteousness*) and in his dying for our sins as the law prescribes (his *passive righteousness*). “Apart from law” refers to the way we obtain the righteousness God demands, not to what Christ did to provide that righteousness for us.

### 3. *The righteousness of God.*

When Paul writes of the righteousness of God in Romans he usually means the righteousness God provides for men and women in Jesus Christ rather than the righteous character of God himself. An exception is 3:25-26, where Paul has in view both God’s righteousness for men and his intrinsic holiness and goodness. The righteousness of God for people found in Christ is not the intrinsic righteousness of Christ’s divine nature; rather, it is his righteous life and death for us. Romans makes it clear that by faith we receive the work of Christ for us, not an attribute of his divine nature.

The true character of God’s righteousness for us filled Martin Luther with joy. As long as Luther believed that the righteousness God spoke of in Romans described God’s holy character, which demands that every sin be punished, he secretly hated God. But when he came to see that the righteousness of God in Romans describes a righteousness provided by God for him, the very righteousness he needed to merit acceptance by a holy God, Luther came to love and rejoice in God.

### 4. “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

The ultimate result of sin is to be forever deprived of the glorious presence of God. When Adam and Eve sinned their fellowship with God was broken. They were driven from God’s presence and deprived of eternal life (Genesis 3:23-24).

The Gentile nations remained separated from God. They knowingly rejected his glory in favor of their false gods and chose moral degradation for themselves, all the time knowing that they deserved death for their choice (1:23, 32). God chose Israel out of all the nations to be his own people, and he dwelt in glory in their midst (Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:1-13). But Israel fell into sin and also suffered the loss of God’s glorious presence (1 Samuel 4:21; Psalms 74, 79, 80). The prospect of sharing the everlasting glory of his presence (Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:7, 10) was forfeited by Gentile and Jew alike.

Our redemption in Christ restores the hope of sharing the glory of God (5:2, 5:8, 8:18-21; Colossians 2:27), for Christ himself is the glory of the Father (John 1:14, 17:1-5; Hebrews 1:3), and

we shall be with him and be like him (1 John 3:2).

### **5. *Guilt, judgment, grace, sacrifice.***

We must be perfectly clear about the relationship between guilt, judgment, grace, and sacrifice in order to have a mature understanding of the gospel.

Sin, the breaking of God's law, incurs *guilt* before God. That guilt brings the sentence of death, the *judgment* prescribed by the law (1:32). We were under the curse of the law and deserved nothing but condemnation (Galatians 3:1-14). God did not *have* to save us, he *chose* to save us out of his *grace*, that is, his good pleasure and loving favor. God could not deny his holy nature by forgiving the guilty, he had to carry out the death sentence demanded by his righteous law. It was his will to redeem us, and redemption according to the law had to be based on the principle of a life for a life (Deuteronomy 19:21), the sacrifice of a perfect life as a substitute for the life of the condemned sinner.

Christ freely chose to carry out the will of the Father to redeem his guilty people. He lived on earth as a man in perfect obedience to the law of God; then he took the curse and sentence of the law on himself when he offered his perfect life as a *sacrifice* for us. By dying in our place he suffered God's judgment on our behalf. Because he fulfilled the law for us in his life and death he satisfied all the demands of God's justice on our behalf. *Christ is our righteousness* (1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:21), hence Paul's statement in 5:21 that God willed his grace to reign in righteousness.

### **6. *The blood of Christ.***

Critics of the Christian faith have faulted the Bible's emphasis on the blood of Christ. They consider it a vestige of an earlier, savage, primitive state of religion when worshipers offered human and animal sacrifices to appease the gods. They believe the idea that God requires blood to appease his wrath to be an unworthy concept of God.

#### *Bases for Objections*

(a) It is unworthy of an infinitely loving God to punish anyone at all. An infinitely loving God would desire to change and rehabilitate people, not punish them.

(b) A bloody death is too degrading and extreme a punishment for our sins, at least for the sins of most of us. Most people do not deserve such a fate for the paltry sins they have committed, and an infinite God would be big enough to forgive people their sins without demanding such a terrible price.

(c) It is morally impossible for one man to take the punishment of another. Such an act is not right, and a just God would not allow it.

#### *Replies*

The Christian must maintain against all critics that the blood of Christ was a necessary and sufficient payment for our sins. In answer to the above objections we reply:

(a) The rehabilitation and transformation of the sinner is not inconsistent with punishment. Rehabilitation is impossible unless one's sins have been expiated or wiped out by payment of the due penalty. An infinitely loving God will deal with guilt, not sweep it under some celestial rug. Moreover, the God of infinite love is also infinitely holy and righteous. He cannot compromise his holiness by ignoring our guilt. Our guilt can be dealt with in only one way that does not compromise his holiness: it deserves punishment, and must be punished. To deny the necessity of punishing sin is to deny God's essential holiness.

(b) People who believe that most men's sins do not merit death simply do not take sin as seriously as God does. Since, in the last analysis, all sin is an offense against an infinite God, all sin deserves the infinite penalty, eternal death. True, Christians do not believe that all sins are equally evil. Some sinners will be beaten with few stripes and some with many stripes on the Day of Judgment (Luke

12:47-48). Yet all eternal punishment involves the infinite penalty of exclusion in hell from the glorious presence of God.

(c) Even if he himself were sinless, an ordinary man, a finite creature, could not bear the sins of others. But human nature and the Godhead were united in one person in Jesus Christ. The person of Christ is infinite by virtue of his divine nature; he was thus capable of bearing the sins of all and atoning for them. The work of Christ was greater than that of Adam (5:15) and required for its fulfillment the infinite One who was and is both God and man (5:15-20).

But is it morally right for one man to suffer for another person's sins? Is it right to let the truly guilty party off the hook and punish instead one who deserves no punishment? How can a holy God be satisfied with that?

In reply we may ask, Can one person represent another in any action at all? If *representation* - acting on behalf of another - is possible at all, why not in payment of a penalty? We allow others to pay our debts when we can't do so ourselves. We allow others to wage war on our behalf and to raise taxes. We allow others to carry out executions - an awesome responsibility - in our name. Why should God refuse the life and death of Jesus Christ offered voluntarily on our behalf? Christ Jesus is the God-man. His Person is infinite. He is morally acceptable in all he does. He can pay any price. To deny his ability to represent us is to deny his divine attributes of infinity and holiness.



**LESSON 5. Romans 4:1-12*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. To whom in particular is chapter 4 addressed? *v. 1*
2. The Jews were proud of their forefather Abraham, but of what could Abraham be proud? *vs. 2-3*
3. What was Abraham's spiritual condition when he put his faith in God? *v. 4; also Joshua 24:2-3*
4. How are faith and righteousness related? Is our faith equivalent to our righteousness? *vs. 3, 5; also 3:22*
5. Paul quotes David in vs. 6-8 to substantiate his argument. What is his point in vs. 1-8 and why is David a particularly strong witness?
6. What was Abraham's *physical* condition when he put his faith in God? *vs. 9-10*
7. Why does Paul call attention to the fact that Abraham was uncircumcised at the time he was justified? *vs. 11-12*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. To whom in particular is chapter 4 addressed? v. 1**

Chapter 4 is addressed to those who claim Abraham as their forefather, i.e., the Jews.

### **2. The Jews were proud of their forefather Abraham, but of what could Abraham be proud? vs. 2-3**

Abraham had nothing to be proud of in himself, certainly not his deeds.

### **3. What was Abraham's spiritual condition when he put his faith in God? v. 4; also *Joshua 24:2-3***

Abraham was *ungodly*.

### **4. How are faith and righteousness related? Is our faith equivalent to our righteousness? vs. 3, 5; also *3:22***

Verses 3 and 5 seem to indicate that our faith itself is our righteousness. But comparison with 3:22 shows that faith *per se* is not our righteousness, but the *means* by which we receive the righteousness of Christ as our own. My faith is as imperfect as my works. It is less than a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:20) and is in itself no more acceptable to a holy God than my works. But the life and death of Jesus Christ were perfect and wholly acceptable to God. His life and death were on my behalf: Christ lived and died for *me*. Faith rests on the doing and dying of Christ as God's righteousness for me. In short, faith is not my righteousness, but it is my trust in the work of Christ as my righteousness.

### **5. Paul quotes David in vs. 6-8 to substantiate his argument. What is his point in vs. 1-8 and why is David a particularly strong witness?**

Paul's main point in these verses is that God reckons or credits righteousness to a sinner wholly apart from his or her works. David is a compelling witness to this truth because God considered him a man after his own heart in spite of the fact that David committed worse sins than most men, being both an adulterer and a murderer (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet God did not count David's sins against him; rather, he accounted him righteous. Why? Because David trusted God's promises to forgive him, deliver him from danger, and exalt him (1 Samuel 17:37, 45-47; 2 Samuel 22; Psalms 31, 34, 40, and many more).

### **6. What was Abraham's *physical* condition when he put his faith in God? vs. 9-10**

Abraham was uncircumcised.

### **7. Why does Paul call attention to the fact that Abraham was uncircumcised at the time he was justified? vs. 11-12**

(a) Paul wants to reemphasize the point he made earlier (2:25-29): circumcision does not justify a man. Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised; circumcision followed faith. Circumcision was given as a sign and seal to confirm the righteousness Abraham had received by faith.

(b) Paul also wants to reemphasize another point he made earlier: there is one way of salvation for all men, uncircumcised Gentiles as well as circumcised Jews (3:22, 29-30). All can follow Abraham's example of faith just as they are, without submitting to circumcision or becoming Jews first (Acts 15:5-11). Like Abraham, all can be justified by faith in God's promises fulfilled in Christ.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### ***1. The justification of Abraham and David.***

The law was of supreme importance in Judaism, and Paul knew that most of his Jewish kinsmen did not accept the truth that they could not be justified by works of the law. Since Jews boasted of their descent from Abraham and gloried in the blessings promised to David, Paul emphasizes that both Abraham and David were justified exactly as he has been preaching, through faith without works of the law. He quotes the Old Testament in support of his case (regarding Abraham, Genesis 5:6; regarding David, Psalm 37:1-2).

### ***2. The significance of circumcision.***

In 4:9-11 Paul tells both what was and what was not the significance of circumcision. It was *not* a sacrament bestowing God's verdict of justification. Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, while he was still ungodly, because he believed God. Circumcision was a "sign" and "seal" of the righteousness Abraham had received simply by believing the promise of God to him. God's promise constituted a *covenant* with Abraham; circumcision was the official "sign" and "seal" of that covenant, much as a notarized signature is a visible sign and seal of a human agreement in our society.

God commanded that Abraham's male descendants were to be circumcised also, at eight days of age, for God had made his covenant with them as well as with Abraham himself (Genesis 17:4-8). They were beneficiaries of the covenant even before they were born (Psalm 139:13-17; Isaiah 49:1, 5); hence, they also received the sign and seal of the covenant. Jewish parents were to bring up their children in the knowledge of the covenant promises, believing that they would come to personal faith in the God of Abraham and so be personally justified.

Circumcision bound a Jew to keep the law of God (Galatians 5:3). Obedience to the law was the condition for receiving the blessings of the covenant; disobedience brought condemnation and God's curse (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10). Yet the law was given to Moses more than 400 years *after* God had made his covenant with Abraham. Neither the obedience nor the disobedience of Abraham's descendants altered Israel's status as God's covenant people. In chapter 11 (Lesson 14) Paul will resolve the apparent dilemma of God's eternal choice of Israel in spite of their sin and unbelief.

Too many Jews presumed upon the unchanging faithfulness of God in keeping his covenant with Israel. They believed that their circumcision made them God's people automatically. They lacked Abraham's faith in the God who appeared to him and covenanted with him to be his God - a faith which extended to Jesus Christ himself (John 8:56), the same faith to which Paul now calls them.

Today, too many people presume upon their Christian baptism in the same way Jews of Paul's era presumed upon their circumcision. They lack the personal faith in Christ that Abraham had, yet they believe their baptism automatically makes them part of God's people. Paul's message to us is the same as his word to the Jews. It is faith in Christ that lays hold on the righteousness of God found in his Son. Baptism, whether received as an infant or as an adult, is only the visible sign and seal of the righteousness that comes by faith. Just as the Jews could have the sign without possessing the reality, so professing Christians today can be baptized without actually having been reckoned righteous through faith in Christ. May those who have been deceived in the matter of their baptism and its relationship to personal salvation heed Paul's words to those Jews of his day who based their hope of eternal life on the grounds of their circumcision!

**LESSON 6. Romans 4:13-25*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What did Abraham receive as a result of having the righteousness that comes through faith? *v. 13*
  
2. What ensures us that the promise is still valid? *vs. 14-16*
  
3. How can Gentile believers in Jesus know that *they* will receive the promise made to Abraham? *vs. 16-17*
  
4. In what kind of God did Abraham believe, and what did he believe God would do? *v. 17*
  
5. How is Abraham's faith like our own? *Compare vs. 17 and 24.*
  
6. Compare Genesis 17:17-18 with Romans 4:19-20. How can Paul claim that Abraham did not waver through unbelief?
  
7. What does the *death* of Christ have to do with our salvation? *v. 25*
  
8. What does the *resurrection* of Christ have to do with our salvation? *v. 25*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. What did Abraham receive as a result of having the righteousness that comes through faith? v. 13**

God promised him that he would inherit the world (Genesis 17:4-8, 18:18). The promise was also for his descendants; they likewise would receive the promise by faith.

### **2. What ensures us that the promise is still valid? vs. 14-16**

The promise rests entirely on God's grace, not on works. It is given to those who through faith in Christ alone are reckoned righteous. If keeping the law were the condition for receiving the promised blessing, then the promise would be null and void. The law brings only wrath, for no one keeps the law.

### **3. How can Gentile believers in Jesus know that they will receive the promise made to Abraham? vs. 16-17**

They share the blessing of Abraham because they, as believers in Christ, are true descendants and heirs of Abraham (Galatians 3:26-29).

### **4. In what kind of God did Abraham believe, and what did he believe God would do? v. 17**

Abraham believed in a God who could bring the dead to life. Firstly, he believed that God could bring life to Sarah's womb and give him the son he had promised. Secondly, when God commanded Abraham to slay Isaac, the promised son, he believed God would raise his son from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

### **5. How is Abraham's faith like our own? Compare vs. 17 and 24.**

We believe God raises the dead. He raised Jesus from the dead and he will raise us from the dead when the Lord returns. Perhaps Abraham even knew that God would raise Christ from the dead, for Jesus affirmed that Abraham rejoiced to see his (Christ's) day (John 8:56).

### **6. Compare Genesis 17:17-18 with Romans 4:19-20. How can Paul claim that Abraham did not waver through unbelief?**

The full context of the Genesis passage reveals that Abraham obeyed God by submitting to circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14, 22-27). The act of circumcision for him was an act of faith in the promise of God. God did not judge Abraham's doubts or wavering as unbelief: Abraham's *actions* showed his underlying faith. Like Abraham, our faith is shown by our works, not good works, but works that show faith (James 2:14-26, especially v. 18).

### **7. What does the death of Christ have to do with our salvation? v. 25**

Christ was put to death for our sins. His blood was the penalty required by God (3:25; also Isaiah 53:4-5, Hebrews 9:25-28).

### **8. What does the resurrection of Christ have to do with our salvation? v. 25a**

(a) If Christ was not raised, then his death did not suffice for us, and we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). But his death *did* cleanse us from our sins; he *did* complete his work of redemption. Having completed his work, Christ could be, indeed had to be raised from the dead (Acts 2:24).

(b) As the risen Lord to whom all judgment has been committed (John 5:21-30), Christ will pronounce our verdict of justification on the last day. Indeed, he has already proclaimed that verdict in heaven. There is no longer any place left for Satan, the accuser of our brothers and sisters

(Revelation 12:9-11). The risen Christ pleads continuously on our behalf before the Father (1 John 2:11).

## **STUDY NOTES**

### ***1. Our share in Abraham's blessing.***

God's covenant promises to Abraham included the declaration that he would be a father of many nations (4:17; see Genesis 17:5). Which nations could claim descent from Abraham? There were the Jews, through Abraham's son Isaac; the Arabs, through Abraham's eldest son Ishmael; the Edomites, through Isaac's son Esau; the Midianites, through Abraham's second wife, Keturah; and a handful of small, desert-dwelling tribes through unnamed concubines. These peoples, however, could hardly be described as "many nations."

The fact is, when God made his promise to Abraham, he had Abraham's spiritual descendants in view. Paul informs us in 4:16 that all who share the faith of Abraham are his true children and heirs. They will eventually constitute "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language" (Revelation 7:9). In Romans Paul is neither redefining the scope of God's covenant with Abraham nor denying that God's promises apply to Abraham's physical descendants. But the Holy Spirit had shown Paul that God's promise of a son and an heir had found its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Of all Abraham's descendants, only Christ was perfectly faithful to the terms of the law of the covenant and deserving of the promised covenant blessings.

The fact that Jesus Christ is the true heir of Abraham is of great significance. Those who trust in Christ are *in him*. What he did, he did for us; what he received, he received for us. In him we are the spiritual offspring of Abraham and heirs of the promise God made to Christ (Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 1:3-13).

### ***2. Circumcision and Christian baptism.***

We who are in Christ are Abraham's true heirs, but rather than circumcision we receive baptism. The visible sign of the covenant has been changed, but the spiritual meaning is the same. Our baptism, which represents our identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (Galatians 3:27), represents our circumcision in a spiritual sense (Colossians 2:11-12). Baptism does not save us any more than circumcision saved Abraham or his physical offspring, the Jews. We, like Abraham, are saved by believing God's promises to us in Christ.

Baptism, like circumcision, is to be administered to the children of all believers as well as to believers themselves. Although the sign of the covenant has been changed, still "the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:39). Sadly, tragically, some baptized children will grow up to be unbelievers. But until they are able to show whether or not they have personal faith in Christ, we are to consider them heirs of the promise, and so we are to baptize them.

### ***3. The content of Abraham's faith and our faith.***

Abraham's faith was not a general faith that God exists. Even the demons know God exists - and they tremble with fear (James 2:19). Neither was Abraham's faith a vague assurance that God is good. No, Abraham's faith had both a specific content and a personal vitality that led him to obey and glorify God. If we are to share the faith of Abraham - and no lesser faith will obtain salvation - then our faith must have the same content and commitment, producing the same obedience and praise.

Paul tells us Abraham believed in a God "who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were" (4:17). His was not an abstract faith in a God who creates life out of inanimate matter and will raise all at the resurrection. Rather, Abraham's faith was centered on God's promise that he would have a son of his own whose descendants would be as many as the stars of the heavens. Abraham believed God could give life to his aged body and to Sarah's barren womb. Later, when God commanded him to slay Isaac, the son of promise, Abraham trusted that God would raise

him from the dead in order to fulfill his promise (Hebrews 11:17-19). It was his faith in this promise that God credited to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:4-6). Indeed, Abraham saw beyond Isaac to Christ, the true Seed or Offspring to whom the covenant promises were made (Galatians 3:16). He rejoiced at the thought of seeing Jesus's day, and he actually did see it (John 8:56).

Our faith must also produce obedience to the command of God. Stressing that only a faith that leads to obedient action is genuine, James cites Abraham as an example of such active faith (James 2:20-23). Paul stated in 1:17 that the Christian life begins and continues by faith, and he considered it part of his apostolic responsibility to lead Christians into the obedience that comes from faith (1:5).

Our faith must also produce praise. Abraham grew stronger in faith and glorified God (4:20). The extent to which we praise and glorify God is a measure of the strength of our faith.

#### ***4. "Raised to life for our justification."***

A new believer knows why Jesus had to die. By his death he paid the penalty for our sins. The young Christian also knows that Jesus was raised from the dead after three days. However, he is not always fully aware of what Jesus accomplished by his resurrection. Paul writes that Jesus was raised for our justification. What does that mean?

Justification is God's verdict of acquittal, the declaration of the Judge of all the earth that one is righteous in his sight. Until the penalty for our sins had been fully paid for, God could not acquit us. If the death of Christ had not been sufficient to atone for our sins, Christ would still be in the grave, and we would still be guilty before God (1 Corinthians 15:13-17).

But the death of Christ was a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of his people. The penalty was completely paid. God's wrath was entirely propitiated. Christ finished the work the Father gave him to do (John 17:4, 19:30). There was no way the grave could hold our Savior once he had finished his work of atonement (Acts 2:24). The resurrection of Christ marked the completion of his work and cleared away every obstacle to our justification.

When God raised Christ from the dead he raised him to his own right hand, the most exalted position in heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:8-11; Hebrews 1:3b). In glorifying the resurrected Christ, God not only bore witness to the acceptability and sufficiency of his work, but placed him over all creation as judge of all. The Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). The Judge who will proclaim our justification to the universe on the last day is none other than he who purchased it with his own blood (8:33-34). Although we are justified from the moment we believe, yet the risen Christ will declare our righteousness before men and angel at the end of the age.



## LESSON 7. Romans 5:1-21

### *STUDY QUESTIONS*

1. What is the ground of our assurance that we will continue at peace with God? What is the basis of our peace with God? *vs. 1-2*
  
2. What hope does this assurance bring? *vs. 2.*
  
3. It is natural to rejoice in our hope for the future, but we can even rejoice in present suffering. How does suffering now produce hope for the future? *vs. 3-4*
  
4. What keeps our hope strong in spite of continued suffering? How can we be sure we will endure through thick and thin? *v. 5*
  
5. Summarize Paul's words of encouragement in vs. 6-10.
  
6. Paul rejoices in three things as a result of our justification. What are those three things? *vs. 2-11*
  
7. How did the sin of Adam affect us? *vs. 12-19*
  
8. In vs. 13-14 Paul offers proof that we suffer the consequences of Adam's first sin. Summarize his argument.
  
9. How was Adam a *type* of Christ? *vs. 15-19*
  
10. How was Christ's act of redemption greater than Adam's act of transgression? *vs. 15-19*
  
11. Why did God give Israel the law? *v. 20*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. What is the ground of our assurance that we will continue at peace with God? What is the basis of our peace with God? vs. 1-2**

(a) We have been justified through faith in Christ. We will remain at peace with God as long as we continue to trust Christ. The basis of our justification, and hence our peace with God, is the work of Christ and not our own works.

(b) Through Christ we have entered the sphere of God's grace, that is, the sphere of God's special favor (John 1:17). All who are in Christ stand in God's grace. This is the basis of our peace with God.

### **2. What hope does this assurance bring? v. 2; see also Daniel 12:2-3.**

We hope to share the glory of God. See also 1:23, 2:7 and 10; John 17:10; Colossians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Peter 1:3. Note: in the Bible hope is not a vague wish for an uncertain outcome, but optimistic faith directed towards the future based on the promise and character of God.

### **3. It is natural to rejoice in our hope for the future, but we can even rejoice in present suffering. How does suffering now produce hope for the future? vs. 3-4**

Tribulation and suffering produce patience, steadfastness, and endurance in the Christian. As we continue to endure, we realize that our very endurance is proof that our faith is real. Another interpretation: endurance creates *character* that is seen to be tested and approved by God. The Greek word translated *character* in the ESV can also mean approval, tested character, or proof. Such proof or character gives us reason to hope for the future (see James 1:2-3).

### **4. What keeps our hope strong in spite of continued suffering? How can we be sure we will endure through thick and thin? v. 5**

Our hope remains strong because of the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The love of God in our hearts that Paul has in mind is probably the Spirit-inspired assurance that God will continue to keep us in the circle of *his* love (5:6-10 ff.) rather than our love for God that the Holy Spirit generates in us.

### **5. Summarize Paul's words of encouragement in vs. 6-10.**

We can be confident that God will not let us slip away now that we belong to him. God loved us enough to send his Son to die for us when we were his enemies. Now that we are reconciled to him we are his friends, abiding in the sphere of his saving grace. We now have all the more reason to believe that he loves us and will preserve us as his own.

### **6. Paul rejoices in three things as a result of our justification. What are those three things? vs. 2-11**

Paul rejoices in our hope of sharing the glory of God (v. 2), in our sufferings (v. 3), and in God himself (v. 11).

### **7. How did the sin of Adam affect us? vs. 12-19**

The trespass of Adam made all people sinners (5:12, 19), resulting in the condemnation and death of all (vs. 15, 18, 19). Note: Paul uses the terms "all men" (vs. 12, 18) and "the many" (vs. 15, 19) synonymously and interchangeably (compare parallel verses).

### **8. In vs. 13-14 Paul offers proof that we suffer the consequences of Adam's first sin. Summarize his argument.**

The fact that all die proves that God holds all to be guilty of sin, since death is the result of sin (6:23;

Genesis 2:17, 3:3). Sin is disobedience to the law of God (1 John 3:4). People did not possess the law of God in verbal form during the time from Adam to Moses (with a few exceptions, like Abraham - see Genesis 18:19, 26:5), yet all died. Personal sin is not counted against those who have no law to transgress (4:15), but all die, even those, like infants, who are not personally transgressors. Paul concludes that the universal reign of sin must be attributed to a greater cause than the personal sins of men and women. That cause is *Adam's* transgression. His act made sinners of us all, because Adam, like Christ, was a *representative* of the many. See study note 5 for a fuller discussion of vs. 13-14.

### **9. How was Adam a type of Christ? vs. 15-19**

A *type* is someone or some thing that prefigures a later person or thing in some respect(s). Adam was a type of Christ in that:

- (a) The actions of the one man Adam affected us all.
- (b) Adam was a representative of the many. What he did was done on behalf of all and was imputed to all (thanks a lot, Adam!)

### **10. How was Christ's act of redemption greater than Adam's act of transgression? vs. 15-19**

The grace of God in Christ has abounded *much more* than the sin and death that abounded through Adam (vs. 15, 20). Justification based on Christ's righteousness is greater than condemnation based on Adam's act of unrighteousness (vs. 16, 18). The grace and righteousness that are ours in Christ ensure that we will reign in eternal life, much more than death has reigned in this world through sin (5:17).

### **11. Why did God give Israel the law? v. 20**

God gave the law so that *trespasses* (sins against a known standard) might multiply. But God had a purpose in letting sin multiply: he intended to make his grace multiply all the more in Jesus Christ (see 7:7-13).

## ***STUDY NOTES***

### ***1. Peace with God.***

As he begins chapter 5, Paul turns from the subject of justification by faith to the results of justification. The first and most obvious result of our justification is that we are reconciled to God. Once his enemies and the objects of his wrath, now we have become his friends and the objects of his special care. We are at peace with God.

Peace with God as Paul describes it is not an inner state of tranquility and contentment. Such a state may well follow from the realization that we are no longer God's enemies, but it is not what Paul has in view here. He is writing about an objective state or relationship between a believer and the Lord, not a subjective feeling. Psychological states have not entered into Paul's thinking up to this point (they will in chapter 7). His emphasis has been on our objective guilt as condemned sinners and our subsequent objective acquittal as justified believers in Christ. Although he turns immediately to the subject of assurance (see note 2, below), Paul says that the basis of Christian assurance is our objective relationship with God, a state of peace that has replaced our former state of estrangement, alienation, and hostility.

### ***2. Suffering and assurance.***

In 5:1-2 Paul assures us that we are at peace with God and are in a state of special grace by referring to God's verdict of justification on all who trust in Christ. In vs. 3-10 he invites us to be assured of our status with God by meditating on our sufferings and their outcome.

Suffering, particularly suffering because of our identification with Christ, is an inevitable part of the Christian life (Matthew 5:12-13; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7; Revelation 1:9). God has ordained suffering as a means of growing in Christian virtues and character (Hebrews 12:5-13; James 1:2-3). We know that endurance and patience do not always lead to patient endurance, nor do they always produce godly character. Sometimes continued suffering produces bitter, hardened, hopeless survivors. Paul's argument in vs. 3-5 is based precisely on the difference between the way believers and unbelievers react to suffering and trouble. God gives us proof of his abiding love by working Christian character and hope in our lives through tribulation that would wither and blight souls lacking his special love and favor.

In looking to our own character for assurance, we are bound to find many traits that grieve us, but Paul does not bid us dwell on our defects and besetting sins. Does our faith in God and his goodness remain in spite of testing? Do we still possess the hope of sharing the glory of God (v. 2)? These are the characteristics that ought to give us assurance. The fact that we have not given up on the Lord in spite of troubles that cause others to turn away in bitterness and unbelief proves that he has not cast us away, for faith and hope in the living God are gifts of the Holy Spirit (v. 5; also 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 5:22).

### ***3. "We also rejoice in God" (5:11).***

Three times in chapter 5 Paul writes "we rejoice" (or, if the Greek verb is understood as an imperative, "let us rejoice").

- (a) We rejoice in our hope of sharing God's glory (v. 2).
- (b) More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings (v. 3).
- (c) Even more than these, we rejoice *in God himself* because of our justification in Christ,

The fact that God has provided Jesus Christ for our justification tells us more about God than we could ever know from contemplating his creation and his law. The fact that God gave his Son for our sins reveals him to be a loving, gracious God who is true to his word (John 3:16). God's love, mercy, and patience had been shown to humankind countless times in nature, in his past and present dealings

with the human race, and in his word. But Jesus Christ revealed these features of God's character in such a surpassing manner that we are compelled to rejoice in God.

Recall once more the example of Martin Luther (Lesson 4, study note 3). As long as he thought of God solely as a holy, righteous, all-powerful, and all-knowing Judge who holds all accountable for every word and deed, Luther secretly hated God. Only when he understood what God had done for him in Christ and believed the gospel did he recognize him to be loving and merciful - and then rejoiced in God.

#### ***4. Adam, our father and representative.***

In vs. 12-21 Paul seeks to assure us that the work of Christ was greater and better in every way than the sin of Adam. In these verses he proves that the action of Adam was universal and catastrophic, bringing guilt, condemnation, death, and depravity on all his descendants and rendering them utterly helpless.

Adam did not simply bring sin and death into the world as a child brings an illness home from school and infects the whole family. He did not make people sinners simply by introducing sin as the source of the temptations to which all succumb. Adam's role in making us all sinners was more decisive. Like it or not, *Adam acted on our behalf*, representing the whole human race yet unborn. His actions were reckoned or imputed to all his descendants, to the whole human race. Paul is quite clear that Adam was our representative and that his sin, guilt, and condemnation are considered ours as well.

This truth is not widely believed today, and when people hear it, almost all reject it. People naturally feel that it is unjust and unfair to be condemned for someone else's sin. Doesn't the Bible declare that people must answer for their own sins, not those of their parents or their children (Ezekiel 18, especially v. 20)?

Yes, but Adam was a special case. He was a *type* or figure of Christ in that God made him, an individual human being, the representative of the many. He acted for us all. Consider: death, the penalty for sin (6:23) extended even to those who died before the law was given (vs. 12-14). How else can we explain the universality of death, the penalty for transgressing God's law, if not because of the sin of our first father? See study note 5, below for further discussion.

Let us consider that Paul makes no reference to our condemnation in Adam in chapters 1-3. I believe that was a practical matter. In those chapters Paul was not seeking so much to prove the fact of universal sin and guilt as to convict men and women of their personal sin and guilt. His argument in chapters 1-3 was based on the sins we personally commit, whether trespasses of the written law by Jews or of the law written in the hearts of all human beings, Gentiles as well as Jews. Perhaps Paul thought that only those who had been justified through faith in Christ were able to accept the truth that they were born with sin already put to their account.

Adam incurred *guilt* before God when he sinned; he also *died that very day* as God had decreed (Genesis 2:17). Since he lived to a ripe 930 years, his death on the day he sinned must have been a *spiritual* death. His very nature became corrupt, sinful, ungodly, and depraved. He passed that nature along to his descendants. We inherit a sinful nature from Adam just as we inherit physical characteristics. Theologians call this inherited sinful nature *original sin*.

Our inheritance from Adam, then, consists of *imputed* (reckoned or credited to our account) sin and guilt and a sinful nature. Beginning at conception, before we enter the world, we are burdened down with guilt, condemnation, and corruption. That is terrible news, but the gospel is the good news that God delivers those who trust in Jesus Christ from all of that, and does even more for us, more than we can ask or think.

### 5. *Romans 5:13-14.*

Commentators have offered widely different interpretations of vs. 12-14. The last clause of v. 12, “because all sinned,” has been the center of marked debate. Do the words *all sinned* refer to the personal sins of all or to the identification of all with the sin of Adam?

Verse 12 begins but does not complete a comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ. (Compare v. 12 with vs.15-19, where Paul draws several comparisons and contrasts between Adam and Christ.) Verses 13-14 are parenthetical. Apparently, after writing “because all sinned,” Paul deemed it necessary to interrupt the comparison and contrast begun in v. 12. I believe he did so because some were likely to dispute the statement “all sinned.” Verses 13-14 are intended to prove his point in v. 12. But what is that point? And what is the logic of Paul’s argument in these verses?

Paul wishes to prove that all were constituted guilty sinners in Adam. He has already proved that all have personally sinned (1:18-3:20), but that fact might be explained by asserting that each man and woman falls as Adam fell, by personal transgression of God’s law. Paul affirms in v. 13 that sin was in the world before the Law of Moses was given. Sin is lawlessness, the transgression of God’s law. (1 John 3:4) Sin in the world before Moses must have been sin against the law written in human hearts (2:14-16). Paul goes on to say in v. 13 that sin is not counted where there is no law. Is he saying here that God does not impute personal sins in the absence of the written law? Some commentators have thought so. Why else would Paul have referred to the one period in human history when there was no written law?

But do all people have the law written on their hearts? Certainly all who are capable of hearing and understanding Paul’s arguments do. But what of infants, the severely retarded, and the mentally ill? These constituted a large segment of those dying in Paul’s day, as they have in almost all ages. Though they know not the law, such individuals suffer death as well as those who know right and wrong.

The *reign*, the universal sway of death over all mankind, transgressors and non-transgressors alike, must be due to a greater cause than the personal sins of those transgressing God’s law, whether written on tables of stone or in the human heart. *All die because of Adam.* He, like Christ, acted as the representative of humanity; his sin was imputed to all.

### 6. *Grace Abounding.*

Paul’s aim in vs. 12-21 is to show that God’s grace is so great that it can completely overcome sin and its effects. To reveal the greatness of God’s grace, Paul reveals how pervasive sin is and how helpless is the sinner without his grace. Paul had shown the universal extent of sin in earlier chapters. *All* have sinned personally, even the Jews. However, until now he had not proved that all were *inevitably* sinners, guilty before God and spiritually dead even before they were born. He had not proved earlier that no one *could* keep God’s law, only that no one actually *did* keep it. Here in 5:12-21 he proves that no one *can* live sinlessly.

However, let us not be so zealous to prove original sin and guilt to the unbeliever that we forget either Paul’s emphasis on the actual, personal sins of all people in chapters 1-3 or his major emphasis in chapter 5 on the greatness of God’s grace in Christ. No matter how hopeless and helpless we are in Adam, God’s grace is greater than our plight. All the contrasts and “much mores” in these verses are intended to magnify God’s grace in Christ so that we may “rejoice in God” (v. 11) and be all the more assured of our salvation. Grace is stronger than nature. Sin reigned in death, exercising complete power over all. In those whom God has brought to eternal life, God has ended the tyranny of sin. Now grace reigns (v. 21).

Grace reigns *in righteousness*. God does not bestow his grace on us with a wave of his hand, overlooking our sin. The reign of sin could not be ignored; it had to be shattered and defeated. Grace established its reign through the righteousness of Christ, and it reigns presently only in those who

have received that righteousness through faith. The tyranny of sin is still a grim reality in the lives of unbelievers.

Some have interpreted vs. 12-21 in terms of universal salvation. They argue that just as *all people* sinned and died in Adam, so *all people* are justified and brought to life in Christ, whether they know it or not. According to this theory, evangelism is simply telling men and women that they have been saved all this time without knowing it! This theory is wrong! Paul's entire emphasis in Romans has been that we lay hold of righteousness and life *through faith in Christ*. The apostle reiterates the necessity of faith in v. 17. The reference to "all men" receiving justification and life in v. 18 must be understood with this in mind. In one sense Christ died "for all," i.e., "the many" - see the answer to study question 7. However, all fallen mankind are not saved (Matthew 5:13-14; Acts 2:21; 1 Corinthians 1:18). For whom exactly did Christ die? This question is taken up in Romans 9.

## *II. NEW LIFE IN CHRIST*



**LESSON 8. Romans 6:1-23*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Compare 6:1 with 5:12-21, especially 5:20-21. What is the connection between 5:20-21 and chapter 6?
2. As Christians, what is our relationship to sin? *vs. 1-2*
3. What does it mean that we were baptized into Christ's death? *vs. 3-5*
4. What three things follow from our death with Christ? *vs. 4-8*
5. How could Christ, who never sinned, die to sin? *vs. 9-10.*
6. How can we make our death to sin and our new life in Christ real in our experience? *vs. 11-13*
7. Sin must not be our master because we have died to it (vs. 12-19). Give another reason why sin shall not be our master. *v. 14*
8. What besides law, can make us sin's slaves? (*vs. 15-16; see also Exodus 21:5-6*)
9. What is the outcome of slavery to sin? *v. 16*
10. How does one become free from sin and a "slave" to righteousness? *vs. 17-19*
11. What is the outcome of "slavery" to righteousness? *vs. 19-23*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. Compare 6:1 with 5:12-21, especially 5:20-21. What is the connection between 5:20-21 and chapter 6?**

Paul's main point in 5:12-21 is that where sin flourished and increased, God's grace abounded all the more. God gave the law so that trespasses might increase, all in order that he might make grace even more overwhelming. Therefore, in chapter 6 the question naturally arises, "Shall we continue in sin now that we are justified so that God's grace will go on increasing?"

### **2. As Christians, what is our relationship to sin? vs. 1-2**

We died to sin.

### **3. What does it mean that we were baptized into Christ's death? vs. 3-5**

Baptism represents our identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, with all that implies. See 4:3-25, study note 1; see also study note 2 of this lesson.

### **4. What three things follow from our death with Christ? vs. 4-8**

- (a) We have new life in Christ. The "old self" is dead.
- (b) We have the hope of resurrection. Our "body of sin" will be purified, glorified, and raised on the last day.
- (c) We have been freed from slavery to sin and no longer need to give in to it.

### **5. How could Christ, who never sinned, die to sin? vs. 9-10.**

He died once to sin for all, as the representative or substitute for sinners.

### **6. How can we make our death to sin and our new life in Christ real in our experience? vs. 11-13**

- (a) We are to *consider ourselves dead* to sin and no longer under its domination; and we are to *consider ourselves alive* to God. To *consider ourselves* is to believe that God has accomplished it (even if we don't feel it.)
- (b) We are to *present our bodies* to God as those who are spiritually alive. We are to seek his will and to try to do it, believing that he will enable us to live in faithful obedience to his law.

### **7. Sin must not be our master because we have died to it (vs. 12-19). Give another reason why sin shall not be our master. v. 14**

We are no longer under law, which binds us to sin (1 Corinthians 15:56). We are now under grace; that is, we are in the sphere of his special favor. Part of this grace or favor is the power to overcome sin.

### **8. What besides law, can make us sin's slaves? (vs. 15-16; see also Exodus 21:5-6)**

Willing obedience to sin's decrees.

### **9. What is the outcome of slavery to sin? v. 16**

Death.

### **10. How does one become free from sin and a "slave" to righteousness? vs. 17-19**

Obedience to the gospel.

### **11. What is the outcome of "slavery" to righteousness? vs. 19-20**

Sanctification, holiness, and eternal life.

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. *The necessity of living for God.*

Paul's theme in chapters 1 through 5 is our need for righteousness and God's provision of righteousness for us in Jesus Christ. Christ's righteousness is the only righteousness acceptable to God. It has nothing to do with our own obedience to the law, which falls far short of the perfect righteousness God requires.

But if we are justified by faith apart from anything we can do, what becomes of God's law? Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone scandalized Jews, even Jewish Christians. It seemed to them that Paul denied the necessity of personal obedience to God's law. Some opponents even accused him of teaching that we should sin on purpose so that good would come (3:3). Certain Jewish believers contended that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved (Acts 15:1-5). Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone was completely vindicated by a council of elders and apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6-29), but the question remained: What about obedience to God's law? May Christians live as they please now that all their sins have been imputed to Christ?

In our day a *laissez-faire* approach to Christian living all too often results from a misunderstanding of justification by faith. Salvation is too frequently reduced to a 10-minute process of rushing an inquirer through "four things God wants you to know." If the inquirer has no objections to what was said, he or she is persuaded to repeat a stereotyped prayer to "ask Jesus into your heart." The new convert is then assured that he or she is eternally secure. The demands of the Christian life are scarcely mentioned at all - not to mention true repentance and the mercy of God! No wonder so many of our "converts" cannot be differentiated from unbelievers by their fruits. Is the Christian life nothing more than waiting patiently for heaven while living just as before?

Paul addresses the role of Christian obedience to the law in chapters 6-8 and 12-14. We will see that he considers it absolutely necessary to forsake sin and live for God in conformity to his law - but not as a way to merit or to keep our salvation. Paul also faces the fact that our obedience is halfhearted, faltering, and imperfect at best, much as we wish otherwise.

### 2. *Baptized into Christ.*

Baptism into Christ is commonly misunderstood. It's important to know what baptism into Christ does mean and what it doesn't mean. Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglo-Catholic, and Lutheran churches teach that baptism is the means by which God places one in Christ, the event where one is born again. They teach that baptism is necessary for salvation except in certain extraordinary circumstances (e.g., when one has the desire to be baptized but dies before baptism). They interpret passages like vs. 3-4 as literally referring to the effects of water baptism, whereby the waters of baptism actually accomplish our union with Christ in his death and bestow the grace of new life *ex opere operato*, that is, by the work done.

The biblical doctrine of baptism, however, holds it to be a symbolic representation of our union with Christ and our becoming members of his church, which things are effected by faith, not by baptism. We have seen that baptism superseded circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant with his people (lesson 6, study note 2). Baptism, therefore, bears the same relationship to our faith as the circumcision of Abraham bore to his faith, and Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised.

So it should be with adult converts. Yet Abraham's descendants circumcised their sons, even though they were too young to exercise personal faith. Why? because the covenant included their children also. Nevertheless, circumcised Jews were not personally justified until they believed God and obeyed him in faith, trusting that God's promises were for them too. Similarly, we baptize our children because God's promises are for them too, though we don't believe they are saved by baptism if they

fail to trust in Christ.

Verse 5 in the original Greek refers to baptism as the *likeness* of Christ's death. Baptism is a picture or representation of our death with Christ and our new life in him. Christ died to sin; our baptism represents identification with him in his death; therefore *we died to sin*. Paul's words about baptism in chapter 6 were intended neither to define the role of baptism in the life of the Christian nor to exhaust its symbolic content. We read elsewhere in the New Testament that baptism also represents our cleansing from sin, yet Paul does not mention this aspect of the symbolism of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). His intention in referring to baptism here is to reinforce the claim that *we died to sin* when Christ died on the cross, and that should determine how we live our lives.

### 3. *Dead to sin, alive to God.*

What does Paul mean by the phrase, "dead to sin" (6:11)? What aspect of death reflects our relationship to sin now that we have been justified by faith in Christ? Paul certainly does not mean that we are insensitive to temptation and unable to sin, as a corpse cannot sense or respond to stimuli. We know from personal experience that Christians feel temptation and frequently are overcome by it. We shall see that Paul devotes most of chapter 7 to the Christian's struggle against sin.

The aspect of death that now corresponds to our relationship to sin is *severance*, the termination of all ties, affections, and obligations. When one dies, he or she *leaves this world behind* and *enters a new world*. Old debts, old relationships, and old bonds are completely severed and done away with. An irreversible, total breach is made between the dead and this life.

In Christ we died to sin in this radical sense. The real me, the new me, has no citizenship in this world anymore. I am alive to God now. My loyalty, allegiance, obligations, affections, relationships, and interests are all in the new world.

Paul's point is that we *already* have passed over to the other side in spirit. Despite the reality of indwelling sin, we have no business letting the old, unregenerate nature prevail when it seeks to dominate our thoughts and actions. It was nailed to the cross in the person of Christ; it is not the new me created in Christ Jesus, the me with whom God now has to do (7:17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:19-20).

Paul had not written about our old and new natures prior to chapter 6. If we only had Romans 1-5 (and no other New Testament writings,) we might think that the old nature, being justified by faith in Christ, would enter heaven pardoned but unchanged. But here in chapter 6 he begins to describe the life of the believer as the life of a new man or woman, born again by the life-giving Holy Spirit.

### 4. *The "old self" (6:6).*

Paul uses the term "old self" (Greek: *old man*) to denote man's unregenerate nature in its completeness - body, emotions, mind, and will. He uses the terms "body of sin" (6:6) and "mortal body" (6:12) to denote essentially the same thing, the only difference being that the "old self" is broader in scope: it was everything I amounted to before I was saved, it was the whole of me. Now that I am born again and alive to God by faith in Christ, that old self is no longer my true self.

Although the old self died with Christ, it is not (yet) destroyed. I will be free from it when I die or when Christ returns in glory. Till then, it still has evil thoughts, disbelief, desires, and lusts that war against the new me, my spirit which is born again of God.

Paul frequently uses the term "sinful nature" (Greek: *sarx*, literally, *flesh*) as a synonym for "body of sin." The word *sarx* is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament, not always negative. Paul asserts that Jesus Christ possessed *sarx*, yet without sin (Ephesians 2:14). Other New Testament passages also affirm that Christ was *sarx* (John 1:14; Hebrews 5:7; 1 John 4:2). English translations of the New Testament render *sarx* by several words or phrases in addition to "sinful nature" and "flesh."

Throughout the Book of Romans, however, *sarx* consistently denotes unregenerate human nature.

In Romans it is a synonym for the “body of sin” or “old self.” In light of this it is significant that Paul refers to the *likeness* of *sarx* when he refers to Christ’s coming as a man in 8:3. Christ possessed a human nature as well as a divine nature, yet his human nature was without sin - it was *like* our human, sinful nature, but sinless, like Adam’s original human nature before the fall.

### ***5. Slaves of sin, slaves of God***

In Paul’s day slavery was an institution established by law and maintained by the power of the state. Apparently, most slaves accepted their status as a given of the social order, a fact of life one had to live with without rebelling or fleeing from servitude. Indeed, in hard times men would sometimes sell themselves or their children into slavery to improve their lot.

Paul describes the hold sin has on everyone who has not been born again as slavery. The dominion of sin is established by the law (see study note 6, below) and maintains itself by the power of the sinful nature. We had no choice in the matter before we came to Christ; we could not stop sinning. Most of the time we were willing, even eager slaves of sin. When we wanted to refrain from sin for whatever reason, we found we could not. How many alcoholics, how many who abuse their wives or children, how many gamblers or drug addicts wish they could stop the behavior that destroys their families, fortunes, and lives, but cannot! How many “good” people wish they could curb their tongues or control their tempers, but constantly fail!

Paul writes that we were freed from slavery to sin when we died with Christ. Death with Christ severed our worldly relationships, abolishing our spiritual slavery to sin. We are alive with Christ’s life now. We have a new master; we are slaves of Christ. (Recall that in 1:1 Paul identified himself as a *servant* of Christ - the Greek word translated servant in the ESV is better translated *slave*; see Lesson 1, study note 1.) We are freed from the bond of slavery that holds all who are “under law” and freed from the power of the old sinful nature to dominate our thoughts and actions.

### ***6. “Under law.”***

Someone “under law” is obligated to obey the law under threat of condemnation and punishment. He or she is subject to the law and legally guilty if he or she fails to conform to it. In 6:14 Paul asserts that those who trust in Christ are no longer “under law” but “under grace.” Paul will explain in chapter 7 that we “died to the law” in the death of Christ. We are no longer liable to condemnation and punishment, for Christ took those things upon himself - and so we are not under the dominion of the law.

It is not the case that now we are Christ’s we are free to live contrary to the law of God. The entire burden of chapter 6 is to dispel the notion that we can continue living in sin. Sin is transgression of the law of God, and our relationship to the law is different now. We are slaves of Jesus Christ, obligated to obey him. He bought us and we are under grace, under “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), which Paul also calls “the law of the Spirit” (8:2). The law of Christ is the same in content as the old law, yet different and new at the same time (1 John 2:7-8). Paul takes this up in chapter 8.

**LESSON 9. Romans 7:1-25*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Who are the brothers Paul addresses in chapter 7? *v. 1.*
  
2. What breaks the binding force of a law? *vs. 1-3*
  
3. Who was once under the law? *v. 4*
  
4. How did I die to the law? *v. 4*
  
5. What was God's purpose in dissolving my obligation to the law, or did he not dissolve it? *vs. 1-6, 12*
  
6. Freedom from the law does not mean freedom from serving God. In what new capacity or power do Christians serve him? *v. 6*
  
7. What does the law do in us? *vs. 5, 7-11*
  
8. Is the law the source of sin in our lives? *vs. 12-14*
  
9. Who is speaking in 7:14-24, Saul the unconverted Jew or Paul the Christian?
  
10. Does v. 25 summarize the best a Christian can hope for in trying to live a holy life in this world?

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. Who are the brothers Paul addresses in chapter 7? v. 1.**

He addresses his “brothers” who “know the law.” He may have in mind primarily his fellow Jewish Christians. However, Christians of Gentile origin also would have known the law then just as they do now. We ought to take these words as directed to all believers who know God’s Word.

### **2. What breaks the binding force of a law? vs. 1-3**

Death abolishes all legal obligations.

### **3. Who was once under the law? v. 4**

All people. Jewish Christians were under the Law of Moses before they were saved. Gentiles were under the law written in their hearts (2:14-15; see also Galatians 4:5).

### **4. How did I die to the law? v. 4**

I died to the law when Christ died (2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20).

### **5. What was God’s purpose in dissolving my obligation to the law, or did he not dissolve it? vs. 1-6, 12**

God dissolved my obligation to keep the law under penalty of death. In Christ I have already died the death required of transgressors. I am no longer *under law* (6:1-23, study note 6). But God dissolved my bond to the law so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I might bring forth fruit for him. The service my new Lord requires consists of the very works the law prescribes.

### **6. Freedom from the law does not mean freedom from serving God. In what new capacity or power do Christians serve him? v. 6**

We serve as those who are alive, free, and empowered by the grace of God, not as those who are bound by the law to serve.

### **7. What does the law do in us? vs. 5, 7-11**

It reveals that we are sinners. More than that, it stirs up our sinful natures to commit sin (3:19, 5:20).

### **8. Is the law the source of sin in our lives? vs. 12-14**

No. We are already sinful by nature, born that way. The sinful nature is the source of the sinful things we do. The law simply gives the sinful nature more opportunities to express itself as transgression and rebellion.

### **9. Who is speaking in 7:14-24, Saul the unconverted Jew or Paul the Christian?**

Paul is speaking as a Christian. Verses 17 and 20 make it clear that he does not consider the sin dwelling in him as the real Paul any longer. See study note 3 for an extended discussion of this question.

### **10. Does v. 25 summarize the best a Christian can hope for in trying to live a holy life in this world?**

Chapter 6 made it clear that much more is expected of a believer than 7:25 suggests. In v. 25 Paul is not suggesting that the best we can attain to is a desire to obey God’s law, but rather that the disobedience and failure we experience is due to the old sinful nature. In chapter 8 Paul asserts the blessed truth that what the law requires can and must be worked out in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, by whom we can put to death the deeds of our sinful nature.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. *Dead to the law.***

Paul states in 6:14 that we are not under law, but under grace. In chapter 8 he explains *why* we are no longer under law: “we died to the law through the body of Christ.” A law is binding on one only as long as he or she lives. He who has died has paid his legal debt in full and can be declared free. The law no longer has anything against him.

Not only does one’s own death release one from legal obligations, the example of the married woman shows that the death of *another* can release us from some legal obligations (7:1-3). The death of Another, Christ, has freed those who are in Christ from the obligations imposed by the law. Our debt to the law was infinite, for our sins are committed against an infinite God. The demand of the law was eternal death, a demand no finite human being could ever pay. But the death of Christ had infinite value by virtue of his infinite Person. Three days in the bonds of death fulfilled all the law’s demands on all the redeemed. Those in Christ are dead to the law, no longer under it.

### **2. *“The power of sin is the law.”***

These words, found in 1 Corinthians 15:56, express a truth Paul expounds at length in Romans 7. The law provokes the sinful self to sin more. Experience itself shows us that telling people not to do a certain thing all too often has the unintended effect of spurring them on to do it. In this sense, sin finds opportunity in the law to bring forth all kinds of sinful conduct in us (7:8).

The law does not cause us to sin. It does not make us do anything that is not in entire agreement with our own sinful nature. The sinful nature seeks occasion to express itself; it wants to sin. Sin is transgression of the law (4:15; 1 John 3:4). The law provides the sinful nature with opportunities to express itself in rebellion against God by overstepping his bounds (see Psalm 2). The law irritates, provokes, and challenges the sinful nature to sin more.

### **3. *“Alive apart from the law” (7:9).***

When Paul says he was alive apart from the law he is referring to his lack of self-consciousness as a condemned sinner. It is absolutely clear from the earlier chapters of Romans, as well as from other scriptures, that we are born with sinful natures and under the condemnation of death for Adam’s sin imputed to us. We are *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). But we do not naturally know this. We first become aware of our sin and guilt when we realize that our personal acts and thoughts are offenses against God. When we compare our conduct, thoughts, and motives to the standard of God’s law, we discover ourselves to be sinners. The hearing and reading of the law causes us to realize that we are guilty before God and liable to the punishment of death. The law written on our hearts accomplishes this function (12:14-15); the written law brings our personal condition home to us with even greater impact.

Some interpreters take 7:7-11 literally. Appealing to 5:13, they maintain that one is not chargeable for sin unless one has broken a law known to him or her. They believe that little children are not guilty of sin until they have reached the “age of accountability” (whatever that is). But if that were true, why do infants, the severely retarded, and any others deemed incapable of personal sins die? We have already seen that all are born under condemnation for the sin of Adam and are born with sinful hearts whether they know it or not.

We must conclude that Paul’s words in 7:7-11 describe the birth of his *awareness* that he was a sinner and deserved death. We shall discover that the entire seventh chapter from v. 7 on deals with Paul’s self-consciousness, first as a sinner in need of justification (vs. 7-13), then as a new man in Christ struggling to overcome the old sinful nature and live for God (vs. 8-25).



#### 4. The “wretched man” of Romans 7: Saul or Paul?

Verses 14-25 of chapter 7 are among the most controversial in Romans. These verses express the anguish of a man who loves the law of God but finds himself defeated as he tries to live according to that law. He is a man at war with himself, and the old sinful nature is portrayed as victorious in his life. The admission that he cannot find a way to do the good he wants to do, the tone of frustration and defeat - these features of 7:14-25 have led many capable commentators to conclude that Paul cannot be describing his experience as a Christian but rather his former life as a sincere Jew trying to keep the law of Moses. These commentators acknowledge that the Christian struggles against sin, but deny that the Christian's conflict can end in the kind of repeated failure described here. They contend that vs. 14-25 are a direct continuation of vs. 7-13, verses all interpreters agree describes Paul's pre-Christian experience.

Other capable commentators hold that vs. 14-25 reveal Paul's experience as a Christian. Saul the unconverted Jew considered himself blameless according to the law; Paul the Christian knew better (Philippians 3:4-6). As Christians, we love the law of God, desire to obey it, and feel anguish and remorse at our failures. Before we came to know Christ we never loved the law or struggled against sin within us (except maybe for fear of judgment.)

Which view of vs. 14-25 should we adopt? The second interpretation is to be preferred on grammatical and psychological grounds as well as on the basis of its agreement with the rest of scripture. Grammatically, the verbs in vs. 7-13 are in the simple past tense in Greek, whereas the verbs in vs. 14-25 are in the present tense. Paul changed tenses for a reason. That reason can be nothing else than to indicate that the present tense verses 14-25 refer to his present experience as a Christian.

Psychologically, Paul's honesty in vs. 14-25 speaks to our own Christian experience. He is a man who has been through the struggles I am going through as I try to live for God and forsake sin. I never felt such inner conflict before I turned to Christ. I never felt the sin within me was *foreign* and *alien*, “no longer I” (vs. 17, 20), before I was born again.

Other scriptures reinforce this interpretation. Compare vs. 14-25 with Galatians 5:14-17. The Galatians passage is parallel to these verses in Romans (as the Book of Galatians is parallel to the Book of Romans), and the Galatians passage clearly refers to the experience of the believer.

Still, when all is said and done, should not the Christian have victory over sin? Is not Paul's aim in chapters 6-8 to encourage Christians to overcome sin? How can Paul's exhortations in 6:1-7:6 be effective if he is forced to confess his own failure to conquer sin in 7:14-25?

Without minimizing the force of Paul's confession in 7:14-25, we must recognize that he is not presenting the whole of his Christian experience here. Elsewhere he speaks of his life for Christ with more satisfaction: see 1 Corinthians 11:1 and 15:10; 2 Corinthians 4:2, 6:4-8, and 12:2; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 1:21-22; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; 2 Timothy 3:10.

In 7:14-25 Paul emphasizes the defeats and failures of the Christian life to reinforce his argument that the law stirs up sin in fallen human nature - *even in the Christian!* There is a “law of sin” dwelling in the members of my body that still wars against the “law of my mind.” Nevertheless, that very body can be yielded to God as an instrument of righteousness (6:13) now that I am no longer under law but under grace. Paul expounds that truth at length in Romans 8. Taken without chapter 8, chapter 7 offers no hope of victory over sin in the Christian's life until the final resurrection, when the “body of death” will be replaced by a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-57). But in chapter 8 Paul will affirm that even in this life we can and must overcome sin and live for God.

#### 5. The “law of my mind” and “the law of sin” (7:23).

The word *law* (Greek: *nomos*) appears seven times in vs. 21-25. *Nomos* has several meanings in this short paragraph. We will understand these verses better as we distinguish clearly between the various

uses of *law*.

In v. 21 Paul discovers a *law* at work in his life: evil lies close at hand whenever he would do good. Here *law* has a meaning similar to our use of the word when we refer to “the law of supply and demand” or “the law of gravity”: *law* is used to describe the way things are in the world, i.e., a law of nature.

In v. 22 Paul refers to “the law of God,” meaning here just what it means throughout Romans: the law of God is his revealed will for mankind, what he commands and forbids us to do.

In v. 23 the word *law* occurs three times. The first and third references regards the law of sin at work in the members of his body. In these cases *law* refers to the will of the sinful nature and what it commands; it is opposed to the will of God and what he commands. The second reference in v. 23 is to “the law of my [Paul’s] mind.” The passage makes it plain that this law is none other than the law of God (7:22).

Paul’s point in the last paragraph of chapter 7 is this: there is a law at work in his body (expressing the will of the old sinful nature) which is at war with the law of God (expressing God’s will) which rules Paul’s mind. The same truth is expressed in different words in Galatians 5:17. As long as Paul remains in “this body of death” (7:24), it is inevitable - a law of nature - that evil is close at hand when when he wants to do good. So it is with us as well. Yet we can and must triumph in our struggle with sin, as Paul affirms in the next chapter.

**LESSON 10. Romans 8:1-17*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What is God's verdict on those who belong to Christ? *v. 1.*
2. What do the phrases "the law of the Spirit of life" and "the law of sin and death" mean? *v. 2; see also vs. 14a and 7:6.*
3. How did we receive the verdict of "no condemnation"? *v. 3*
4. Why was it impossible to receive such a verdict under the law? *v. 3*
5. What was God's purpose in condemning sin in the body of Christ? *vs. 3-4*
6. How do the justified live? *vs. 3-4*
7. How do the justified think? *vs. 5-6*
8. How do the condemned think? *vs. 6-8*
9. What is the believer's relationship to his sinful nature (or flesh)? *vs. 9-12*
10. How can believers live for God in their mortal bodies, which still bear their old sinful nature? *vs. 13-14*

11. What does the Spirit of God do for us in our struggle against sin? *vs. 13-16*

12. What is our relationship to God now that we are Christians? *v. 14*

13. How can we be assured that we really are God's children? *vs. 15-16*

14. What hope does this assurance give us? *v. 17*

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### ***1. What is God's verdict on those who belong to Christ? v. 1.***

There is no condemnation for them (John 3:18). They are acquitted and justified (3:24, 4:25, 5:1).

### ***2. What do the phrases "the law of the Spirit of life" and "the law of sin and death" mean? v. 2; see also v. 14a and 7:6.***

Two interpretations are possible:

(a) The word *law* here may have a meaning similar to our use of the word when we refer to "the law of supply and demand" or "the law of gravity," a description of the way things are in the world (see Lesson 9, study note 5). If so, the "law of sin and death" refers to the principle that sin leads to death, and the "law of the Spirit of life" refers to the principle that it is the Holy Spirit who gives life.

(b) The "law of sin and death" is the will of the unholy sinful nature, which opposes God's holy will. The will of the sinful nature holds the unbeliever in a state of condemnation and death by the rule and dominion it exercises in his or her life.

(c) Perhaps (though less likely), the "law of sin and death" could refer to the Law of Moses viewed as an external, written code that men are under and against which they rebel, a law which condemns them to death. See study note 2; see also 2 Corinthians 3:5-6.

The "law of the Spirit of life" is God's holy will, expressed in his law and now at work in us by the Holy Spirit. We who have been made alive in Christ both desire to do the will of God and are enabled to do it by the power of the Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 John 2:7-8).

### ***3. How did we receive the verdict of "no condemnation"? v. 3***

God condemned our sin in the body of Christ. He received the condemnation we deserved.

### ***4. Why was it impossible to receive such a verdict under the law? v. 3***

The law was weakened by the old sinful nature, which cannot and does not want to keep the law of God.

### ***5. What was God's purpose in condemning sin in the body of Christ? vs. 3-4***

God's purpose was that the redeemed might glorify him by their obedience, fulfilling the righteous demands of the law by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### ***6. How do the justified live? vs. 3-4***

The justified live "according to the Spirit," that is, under the direction and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### ***7. How do the justified think? vs. 5-6***

They set their minds on the things the Spirit desires.

### ***8. How do the condemned think? vs. 6-8***

They set their minds on the things of the sinful nature. Their minds are hostile to God's law.

### ***9. What is the believer's relationship to his sinful nature (or flesh)? vs. 9-12***

The believer is not controlled by that nature - literally, he or she is "not in the flesh." The "body," i.e., the old nature, is dead, but the spirit is alive, a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

***10. How can believers live for God in their mortal bodies, which still bear their old sinful nature? vs. 13-14***

- (a) We must put to death the deeds belonging to the sinful nature by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) We must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit moves us and shows us how to obey God's law (see Galatians 5:16-20).

***11. What does the Spirit of God do for us in our struggle against sin? vs. 13-16***

- (a) The Spirit enables us to put to death the deeds of the sinful nature.
- (b) The Spirit leads us as God's children, showing us what to do and how to live.
- (c) The Spirit bears witness with our own spirit that we are children of God.

***12. What is our relationship to God now that we are Christians? v. 14***

We are God's children. We are no longer slaves, but sons and daughters (Galatians 4:7).

***13. How can we be assured that we really are God's children? vs. 15-16***

The Holy Spirit testifies to our spirits that it is so. The Spirit moves us to address God intimately as Father. The word *Abba* (v. 15) is not Greek, but Aramaic, the language Jesus grew up speaking. It is closer in feeling to the informal "Daddy" than to the formal "Father." The Spirit moves us to speak to God with the same closeness and intimacy that Jesus felt.

***14. What hope does this assurance give us? v. 17***

Since we are God's children, we shall be his heirs together with Christ. We know that we shall ultimately share his glory even though we may suffer for him now (5:2-4; see also Lesson 11).

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. *The likeness of sinful flesh (8:3).*

Paul seeks to assure those in Christ that they face no condemnation. He reminds them here that Christ came in the very likeness of sinful man to receive the condemnation their sins deserve and to give his life a ransom for many (v. 3). His human nature (flesh) was real human nature - Jesus was no phantom man - yet he was without sin. Real human nature, Christ's human nature, suffered for our sins. There is no more condemnation in store for human nature because human nature suffered its full punishment on the cross of Christ for all believers.

How could Christ assume human nature without assuming *sinful* human nature? Isn't human nature inherently sinful? No, sinfulness is not an attribute of human nature *per se*, human nature as it was created on the sixth day of creation. Adam was fully human before he sinned. Adam's nature suffered the corruption of sin when he fell, and all his descendants born according to the ordinary course of nature inherited that sinful nature. But the conception of Jesus Christ was a special case. The conception of Jesus was a miraculous event in which his holiness was preserved. Scripture states that explicitly in Luke 1:35. His human nature was identical to the human nature we all share except for sin (8:3). It was created in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, but was not created sinful.

### 2. *"the law of the Spirit of life" (8:2).*

Paul frequently contrasts the work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian with the work of the Law of Moses - see, for instance, 2 Corinthians 3:6-9; Galatians 3:2-5 and 4:4-7. Superficial readers of Paul may conclude that he thinks poorly of the Law of Moses, but careful readers will reject that view. In fact, the content of the Law of Moses and the content of the law of the Spirit are the same. Both express the holy will of God for mankind. The difference between the written law and the law of the Spirit is that when we have the Spirit we have within us the knowledge, desire, incentive, and power needed to obey the will of God expressed in the written law. 1 John 2:7-8 says that the difference between the old and new commandments is that the new commandment is the old commandment *coming true in our lives*. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says that the new covenant will no longer be an external written code but will be written in the hearts of God's people.

The written law was a "ministry of death" (2 Corinthians 3:7). It serves only to stir up the sinful nature to further rebellion and to increase transgression and guilt. By contrast, "the law of the Spirit of life" is God's law written in our hearts, worked out in our lives by the power of the Spirit. By the Spirit who regenerated us and gave us eternal life we can and must triumph over our sinful nature.

### 3. *Sanctification.*

Verses 4-13 speak of the believer's *sanctification*. In this context *sanctification* denotes the process of becoming holy in thought, word, and deed. These verses state some important truths about sanctification:

(a) Sanctification follows justification. Verses 3-4 indicate that Christ's work for us, the basis of our justification, precedes the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in us.

The truth that sanctification follows justification is explicitly denied by the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches that the work of the Holy Spirit within us constitutes part of the righteousness of Christ that makes us acceptable to God. Many Protestants are Roman Catholics in heart in this matter, believing that the quality of their Christian lives determines in part their acceptability to God. This error is responsible for much of the lack of assurance of salvation seen in many believers. Let us confess that there is now "no condemnation" for those in Christ (8:1).

(b) Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We don't have within ourselves (that is, in our human nature) the power or inclination to live for God. The Holy Spirit supplies the desire and ability

to obey God when he *regenerates* us (gives us new life) and takes up residence in us.

(c) Sanctification of our mind, of our thoughts, precedes the sanctification of our deeds (vs.5-7). Those who have the Spirit - and all genuine Christians have the Spirit (v. 9) - think about the things of the Spirit. (The things of the Spirit are enumerated in Galatians 5:22-23 and Philippians 4:8.) The things of the Spirit are on our hearts even when we are hindered from doing them by the weakness of our flesh (7:14-25). Only as our minds are transformed can our actions be conformed to the will of God (12:2). We must know how to live rightly before we are able to live rightly, and the desire to obey must precede obedience. Paul relies here on the principle he will state in chapter 12: “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (12:2).

(d) Sanctification entails putting the deeds of the sinful nature to death. This is an active process. Although sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God within us, we are not to wait passively for the Spirit to walk us through the motions of righteousness like puppets in a show. We are actively to refuse the promptings of the sinful nature and instead to choose consciously to obey the law of God. Our inner man is to treat the sinful nature as if it were dead - for it really did die with Christ (Galatians 2:20) - and to refuse to have any dealings with it (8:12-13). We are not to listen to the sinful nature or to think about how to gratify its desires.

(e) Sanctification is a necessity for the Christian. Here Paul dispels any notion falsely derived from Romans 7 that we must resign ourselves to failure in trying to live for God, or worse, to be satisfied with such failure! In chapter 7 he had not yet mentioned the Holy Spirit, the source of our power to prevail over the sinful nature, but chapter 8 is full of the Holy Spirit. No one can claim to be a Christian who has not experienced the inner battle between the Spirit and the flesh. The true Christian continues to fight it out until victories come (vs. 12-13). We will not achieve perfection in this life; we will continue to stumble and fail and suffer defeats. Nevertheless, we ought to experience victory in increasing measure, even as we grow in awareness of how sin permeates our lives! If we cease to fight against sin in our lives, if we lose the desire to live in increasing obedience to the law of God, we ought to examine ourselves to see if we truly are Christ’s and really have the Spirit of God (vs. 13-14).

(f) There is no method or technique for attaining quick sanctification. Paul does not give us a list of rules for victory in our struggle against sin. Indeed, he furnishes no “practical” help here at all. Sanctification cannot be reduced to a technique or method. Paul simply states the truth of who we are and what we have in Christ, leaving it to the Holy Spirit to give us understanding of that truth and to show us how to apply it in our daily lives. He expects that the Holy Spirit will motivate and empower us to do what he shows us we must do.

#### **4. *Sons and heirs.***

Ask your neighbor, “Who are the children of God in this world?” He or she is likely to reply, “All of us are God’s children.” Apparently this belief was common among the pagans in Paul’s day too. (Acts 17:28).

The Jews took a more restrictive view: only Israelites were God’s children. In 2:25-29 Paul argues that a true Jew is not one who has merely undergone physical circumcision, but one whose circumcision is of the heart, one who shows he is a son of Abraham by faith. Christ similarly told the Jews that everyone who commits sin is not a child of God but a slave of sin, (John 8:33-34, 41-44). Indeed, all who are under law are found to be slaves of sin, not children of God (7:5-11).

Paul’s statement in 8:14 is remarkable in the light of what he wrote earlier in Romans. In Christ we are no longer slaves under law, but *sons* (and daughters) led by the Holy Spirit. To be forgiven, yes, that we could hope for, but to be made *sons of God*! We ought to be as surprised by the magnitude of God’s grace as was the prodigal son when he was restored to full sonship (Luke 15:21-24). Yet somehow we are not surprised, for the Holy Spirit moves us to address God naturally as Father with



an intimacy that those who do not know him cannot comprehend. This spontaneous intimacy is part of the Spirit's witness to the reality of our sonship.

The Spirit also gives us confidence that we have an inheritance in heaven with Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14, 18). The Spirit floods our hearts with confidence in the abiding love of God even when we experience trouble and suffering (5:3-5). Paul expands on this theme in the latter verses of this chapter.

**LESSON 11. Romans 8:17-39*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What do Christians need to experience? Why? *v. 17.*
2. What is Paul's estimate of his present sufferings? *v. 18*
3. What is the present state of God's creation? *vs. 19-21*
4. Why is creation in this state? *v. 20*
5. How will creation be restored? *v. 21*
6. What does the future restoration of creation mean for us now? *vs. 22-25*
7. What does the Spirit do for us? *vs. 26-27*
8. Why is this work of the Spirit necessary? *v. 26*
9. God works in all things for the good of whom? *v. 28*
10. What is God's purpose for those he has chosen? *v. 29*
11. What chain of events does God use in making his people eventually to be like Christ? *vs. 29-30*

12. What does each of the events or stages in vs. 29-30 mean?
13. When does each of the events or stages in vs. 29-30 occur?
14. What are the implications of vs. 28-30 for the present? *vs. 31-34*
15. Jesus said that many would lose their faith and fall away in times of persecution (Matthew 24:9-13). Can you reconcile that statement with vs. 35-39?

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. What do Christians need to experience? Why? v. 17.**

We must suffer. The purpose of our suffering is that we may be glorified with Christ (Matthew 5:10-12 and 12:20-21; Philippians 1:29 and 3:10-11; 2 Timothy 1:8; Hebrews 12:2-11; 1 Peter 1:6-7 and 4:13-14).

### **2. What is Paul's estimate of his present sufferings? v. 18**

They are not worth being compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us.

### **3. What is the present state of God's creation? vs. 19-21**

(a) It eagerly longs for the children of God to be revealed in glory.

(b) It is in bondage to decay and subject to "futility" (*vanity* in the KJV and *frustration* in the NIV). *Futility* here means *uselessness, ineffectiveness*. The creation is useless and ineffective in that it neither is nor can be what God intended it to be. It has no meaning in itself and cannot fulfill its original purpose while humankind remains fallen (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11).

### **4. Why is creation in this state? v. 20**

God subjected the creation to decay as a result of the fall (Genesis 3:14-19). It was his sovereign will that the creation should not achieve its fulfillment with sinful man at its head. Yet he cursed creation in hope (Genesis 3:15, a prophetic reference to man's victory over Satan in the Person of Jesus Christ.)

### **5. How will creation be restored? v. 21**

(a) It will be set free from its bondage to decay.

(b) It will be brought into the glorious liberty of God's children.

### **6. What does the future restoration of creation mean for us now? vs. 22-25**

It gives us hope. Our bodies will be redeemed and we will receive the full status, privileges, and powers of the children of God.

### **7. What does the Spirit do for us? vs. 26-27**

The Spirit helps us pray according to the will of God, interceding for us with groans we cannot put in words.

### **8. Why is this work of the Spirit necessary? v. 26**

We are weak. We do not know how to pray as we ought.

### **9. God works in all things for the good of whom? v. 28**

He works in all things for the good of those who love him, for those he has called. In all things he works according to his purpose.

### **10. What is God's purpose for those he has chosen? v. 29**

He wills us to be made like his Son.

### **11. What chain of events does God use in making his people eventually to be like Christ? vs. 29-30**

Those he foreknew he predestined; those he predestined he called; those he called he justified; those he justified he glorified.

**12. What does each of the events or stages in vs. 29-30 mean?**

(a) *Foreknew*: Before the foundation of the world God chose some, the elect, to be his own (Amos 3:2; I Peter 1:2).

(b) *Predestined*: God decreed and established the events that would come to pass in the lives of each of the elect.

(c) *Called*: The Holy Spirit awakens a sense of sin and guilt in the hearts of the elect, reveals Christ to the person, and works faith in his or her heart.

(d) *Justified*: God declares the penitent, believing sinner guiltless and righteous on the basis of the work of Christ.

(e) *Glorified*: God will fully purge the believer of sin and make him or her perfectly holy and righteous like Christ.

**13. When does each of the events or stages in vs. 29-30 occur?**

(a) *Foreknew*: Before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

(b) *Predestined*: Also before the creation of the world.

(c) *Called*: When the Holy Spirit works in us to bring us to repentance and faith in Christ.

(d) *Justified*: When we put our trust in Christ.

(e) *Glorified*: Even now, as we live the Christian life, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image [the image of Christ] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We will be fully glorified at the resurrection.

Study note 3 expands on each of these topics.

**14. What are the implications of vs. 28-30 for the present? vs. 31-34**

We can be confident that he who began a good work in us will surely bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). God works all things for our good in spite of appearances to the contrary. He planned our life from before the creation of the world. He will not abandon us nor forsake us.

**15. Jesus said that many would lose their faith and fall away in times of persecution (Matthew 24:9-13). Can you reconcile that statement with vs. 35-39?**

Read in context and in the light of other passages of God’s Word, it seems clear that Jesus’s words in Matthew 24:9-13 describe those who outwardly appear to be believers but who do not actually have genuine faith (Matthew 24:22-24; see also Philippians 1:6, 2 Peter 2:9; 1 John 2:18-19). The elect, those whom the Father has given to the Son, are *effectually* called and truly believe; they will never fall away (John 6:37-40). We can be sure that the Father has answered and continues to answer that prayer.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. The bondage of creation.**

Many scientists find no purpose in nature. Some claim to find meaning in the evolutionary process, but (to judge by their writings) even a majority of evolutionists firmly deny that one can observe any purpose at work in the natural world or that the laws and cycles of nature have any metaphysical significance.

The Christian should not be afraid to acknowledge that there is some truth in this point of view! God subjected the world to futility, meaninglessness, and decay as a consequence of Adam's sin. The natural world in its present state is not fulfilling the end for which God originally created it, and creation is "marking time" until God restores it to what it was meant to be.

God made man to be the lord of creation under its Creator. The world was made to be under the dominion and care of man (Genesis 1:26-30 and 2:15; Psalm 8:3-8). Once Adam sinned, God did not allow nature to remain under the dominion of fallen man (Genesis 3:17-18). We have little idea of what the world was like before the fall, but God must have wrought profound changes to make it what we see today, a world that supports man only by dint of his toil, a world with no more apparent inherent meaning than fallen man himself possesses. In sentencing man to death (Genesis 3:19) God also subjected creation to frustration and decay.

God subjected creation to frustration and decay "in hope." He purposed to redeem man and place him once more at the head of a restored creation. On the very day that Adam and Eve fell, God promised that someday a man born of woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). That man is Christ Jesus, who by obedience to God dealt Satan (the serpent) a death blow and freed the human race from sin, guilt, and death. When Christ returns to establish his kingdom in its fullness, the redeemed will be freed from bondage to futility, meaningless, decay, and death, and will enjoy the freedom he was created for, fully restored to their original state (Isaiah 35 and 68:17-25). The rest of creation will also be restored (see Isaiah 35, 65:25).

### **2. Adoption as sons.**

Paul refers in 8:23 to our "adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." The Greek word translated *adoption* in v. 23 and in v. 15 can also mean the act of granting the full rights and responsibilities of adult sonship to a minor, i.e., an act establishing a child's legal coming of age. While we are clothed with our present mortal body, the "body of death" (7:24), we cannot enjoy our full inheritance as co-heirs with Christ (8:17). We will receive all the powers and benefits that pertain to us as children of God when our bodies are resurrected and glorified at the coming of the Lord (1 John 3:2).

Yet we are children of God from the time we put our faith in Christ and are born again (John 1:12). The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of adoption as sons" in 8:15 because he witnesses to our born-again spirits that we are even now the children of God (8:16). Possessing the Spirit is "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:14). Because we possess the Spirit of God we know that someday we shall enter into all the rights, powers, and splendor of mature, perfect children of God.

### **3. Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification.**

The answers to study questions 11, 12, and 13 give a brief account of each of these aspects of our salvation. This study note expands on those statements.

(a) *Foreknowledge*. God chose particular men and women before the world began to give to Jesus Christ as his people (Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2). This choice is what Paul calls *foreknowledge*. The New Testament also calls it *election* (1 Peter 1:2).

Some people explain foreknowledge as knowing in advance what will happen in the future. They view God's foreknowledge of persons simply as his prior knowledge of who will respond in faith to the word of Christ. This view of foreknowledge is greatly defective, for it does not do justice to his sovereignty. God knit us together in our mothers' wombs and ordained all our days (Psalm 139:13, 16). If foreknowledge were only prior knowledge, ultimately the choice to believe or disbelieve would be man's. Yet the Scripture makes it clear that God is in complete control of all that comes to pass. If God knows that something will come to pass, it is because he purposes that it shall come to pass.

Paul discusses foreknowledge, or election, at length in chapter 9; a full discussion of the biblical doctrine of election is found in the next lesson of this study guide. For now it is enough to recognize that God chose some to be his own people before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

(b) *Predestination*. God carries out his purposes without fail. He is never frustrated in achieving his aims; he is in total control. He *predestined*, or determined beforehand what would occur in the lives of his elect to accomplish his purpose in and for them. Things do not just happen to believers apart from God's plan. Good fortune, success, suffering, trials, setbacks, tragedies, and hardships, including seemingly random, haphazard, chance, meaningless events - all are predestined by God. Men and women deceive themselves when they think that the choices they make in life, because they are real choices, can circumvent God's purpose for them. No matter how "freely" people choose their paths, at the end of time it will be seen that they were carrying out God's plan all along. This is true of unbelievers (Psalm 76:10; Isaiah 45:1; Acts 2:23), how much more for those whom God has chosen for his own!

(c) *Calling*. In his own good time God *calls* his elect to faith in Christ. Calling includes everything God does to bring a sinner from ignorance, complacency, and unbelief to faith in Christ. It involves awakening of fear and concern for one's soul (Job 28:28; Psalm 86:11; Acts 2:23); instilling a sense of sin and guilt and the certainty of judgment (John 16:7-11); kindling remorse and repentance (Acts 5:31 and 11:18); providing instruction and granting understanding regarding the person and work of Christ (John 6:42-45; 1 Corinthians 1:24); and bestowing faith in Christ as Savior and Lord (Psalm 80:18; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9). Calling is the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6),

(d) *Justification*. Justification is God's act as the righteous Judge of all in acquitting the guilty sinner and declaring him just and upright before the law on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ done on his behalf.

(e) *Glorification*. Glorification is becoming like Christ. It entails the complete sanctification of our persons when the "body of death" (7:24) with its sinful nature is destroyed and we are clothed with a new spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-45).

Paul has devoted a major part of chapters 6-8 to the subject of sanctification, and it may seem puzzling that he does not insert sanctification between justification and glorification. However, we should view sanctification as the beginning of our glorification. To the extent that we are sanctified in this life by putting to death the deeds of the body, so far are we glorified in this life: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). By the power of the Holy Spirit given to us we can make a beginning in sanctification/glorification in this life. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the "guarantee of our inheritance" until our final redemption, resurrection, and complete glorification at the coming of Christ (Ephesians 1:14).

Our sanctification is not completed in this life; completion awaits the resurrection of the body. Yet Paul writes of it in the simple past tense. The outcome is so certain that Paul views it as already accomplished: it is already settled in heaven.

#### **4. *The last word in assurance.***

Paul sums up chapters 1-8 with one of the most lyrical passage in the New Testament. Verses 31-39 bring to a close the first half of Romans. Paul began his letter with the *wrath* of God revealed against *all people* (1:18); he concludes the first half of the book with the *love* of God for his *elect*.

If God is for us, who can be against us? Yes, we must face God's judgment (1 Corinthians 4:10), but the Judge is the very One who loved us enough to die for us. As if that were not enough, the Judge is also the Counsel for the defense who pleads our cause (1 John 2:1). Yes, we may suffer and even die for our faith. Satan hates our Lord and his people, and this world is no friend to grace, but the love God has already demonstrated in sending his Son to die speaks even more powerfully than the hatred of the enemy. Even in our greatest distress God is at work for our good, to conform us to Christ (Philippians 3:10). After meditating on these things, how can we doubt that he will keep us in the faith of Christ and bring us glory?



*III. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MANKIND  
AND HIS PLAN OF SALVATION FOR HIS PEOPLE*

**LESSON 12. Romans 9:1-29*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What is Paul's attitude toward the Jews? *vs. 1-3.*
2. What blessings had God given the Jews? *vs. 4-5*
3. Why might someone think that the Word of God had failed? *v. 6*
4. How does Paul answer the charge that God was not true to his Word? *vs. 6-13*
5. What are God's criteria for choosing and blessing someone? *vs. 14-16*
6. What does this passage say about a person's will? *vs. 16-18*
7. What objections are raised to Paul's conclusions? *v. 19*
8. How does Paul answer those objections? *vs. 20-21*
9. What ends has God destined or prepared people to serve? *vs. 22-23*
10. Do both ends show forth the power and glory of God? If so, how?
11. Why hasn't God already executed judgment on the "vessels of wrath"? *vs. 22-23*

12. Whom did God choose to be “vessels of mercy” *vs. 23-26*

13. Considering that only a few Jews have turned to Christ, are we to think of God as hard in electing only a few or as merciful in electing any at all? Or is there some other way to view the fact that God has elected only a remnant of Israel? *vs. 27-29*

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. What is Paul's attitude toward the Jews? vs. 1-3.**

He is sincerely anguished over their unbelief, for they are his kinsmen. He feels such solidarity with them that he could even wish to be cut off from Christ if it could result in their salvation. Compare with Exodus 32:32.

### **2. What blessings had God given the Jews? vs. 4-5**

(a) *Sonship*. (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1 and 32:4-5; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 3:9; Hosea 1:10 and 11:1; John 8:41).

(b) *Glory*. (Exodus 16:10, 24:16, and 40:34-38; Leviticus 9:6; 1 Kings 8:11; Zechariah 2:4-5).

(c) *Covenants*. (Genesis 15:18 and 17:2; Exodus 2:24 and 6:2-4; Deuteronomy 4:31, 5:2, and 7:9; 1 Chronicles 16:14-18).

(d) *The law*. (Exodus 24:12; Deuteronomy 4:8; Psalms 1:1-2, 119, and 147:19-20; Acts 7:53).

(e) *Worship ordinances*. (Deuteronomy 12; Hebrews 9:1-6).

(f) *Promises*. (Genesis 22:15-18, 26:1-5, and 28:13-15; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; John 8:39 and 52-55; Hebrews 11:8-12).

(g) *The Messiah, or Christ*. (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-14; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Psalms 2 and 72; Isaiah 52:13-53; Micah 5:2; John 4:22).

### **3. Why might someone think that the Word of God had failed? v. 6**

The great majority of Jews in Paul's day had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. For the most part they have continued in unbelief down to the present day. Those who reject their Messiah have forfeited the blessings promised to the patriarchs and their descendants. Can man reject God's promised salvation and thereby make God a liar? And what about the assurance, founded on God's foreknowledge and love, of which Paul writes so eloquently in chapter 8? If God had permitted his people of old to fall away through unbelief, how can *we* be secure? Can man's unbelief make God's promise of no effect?

### **4. How does Paul answer the charge that God was not true to his Word? vs. 6-13**

Not all who are Jews by physical descent are true Jews whom God counts as heirs of the promise. God's purpose included the choice, or election of some to be his people. The rest were not chosen. See study note 2 for an expanded discussion of election.

### **5. What are God's criteria for choosing and blessing someone? vs. 14-16**

God asserts his right to be merciful to whom he chooses. He gives no reason other than his own will (Exodus 33:19).

### **6. What does this passage say about a person's will? vs. 16-18**

Salvation does not depend on a person's will or choice (though we do make a choice.) It is due solely to the sovereign mercy of God (John 1:13).

### **7. What objections are raised to Paul's conclusions? v. 19**

(a) It would be unjust for God to elect some and not others (v. 14).

(b) How can God condemn people for failing to repent and believe if God is in complete control of their destiny?

### **8. How does Paul answer those objections? vs. 20-21**

God has the right to condemn a sinner for his sins; he also has the right to save a sinner from his sins. God is our Creator and he has the right - not simply the power - to do with any of his creatures as he

pleases. At this point in his argument Paul does not seek to reconcile God's absolute right to elect whom he pleases with his infinite love, but by the time he concludes this section of Romans he will have entirely vindicated the love of God as worked out in his purpose of election.

**9. What ends has God destined or prepared people to serve? vs. 22-23**

Some are destined to show the glory of God as he executes his wrath on them because of their sin; others are destined to show the glory of God as he has mercy on them by saving them from their sin and glorifying them in Christ.

**10. Do both ends show forth the power and glory of God? If so, how?**

Yes. God shows his holiness in punishing sin and bringing the evildoer to judgment (Psalms 2 and 9:1-7, 15-17; Jeremiah 21:5; Joel 3:11-12; Revelation 14:7 and 16:7). He shows his love and goodness in justifying and glorifying the elect (1 Chronicles 16:34-35; Ephesians 1:3-14).

**11. Why hasn't God already executed judgment on the "vessels of wrath"? vs. 22-23**

God is very patient, waiting for all the elect "vessels of mercy" to be saved. (See also Matthew 13:24-30, especially verses 28-29; also 2 Peter 3:9).

**12. Whom did God choose to be "vessels of mercy" vs. 23-26**

He chose both Jews and Gentiles.

**13. Considering the fact that only a few Jews have turned to Christ, are we to think of God as hard in electing only a few or as merciful in electing any at all? Or is there some other way to view the fact that God has elected only a remnant of Israel? vs. 27-29**

Paul's emphasis is on sovereign grace. If God were not merciful not even a remnant would be saved (v. 29). But why not a larger remnant? Why doesn't God extend his mercy to all Jews, indeed, to all the world? Romans 9 does not answer these questions, but we must not read Romans 9 in isolation. Paul goes on in chapters 10 and 11 to show how the small remnant of saved Jews in his day (and ours) is part of God's plan for the salvation of "all Israel" (11:26) as well as an innumerable multitude from all nations. Those he has chosen he foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies (see Lesson 11, study note 3, for an expanded discussion). They are the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:14-16; Philippians 3:3), and God is faithful in keeping the promises made to them. Since the rest of Abraham's natural descendants were never included within the scope of God's promises, God cannot be deemed unfaithful for not calling, justifying, and glorifying them.

Paul knows how strongly most people object to the idea that God has chosen some and not others to be his own. Would not God be unjust to favor some of sinful men and women and not others? Did not Paul himself affirm that God is no respecter of persons and that he judges all by the same standard? On what basis can a just and loving God choose to grant repentance and faith to some and not to others?

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. God's Word has not failed.**

The change in mood and subject matter from chapter 8 to chapter 9 is striking. In chapter 8 Paul assures Christians that God is for us no matter how bleak things may seem. The God who chose us and saved us will most certainly keep us in his love forever. Chapter 8 is a message of assurance, hope

and joy.

In contrast, chapter 9 begins with Paul's personal anguish over his people's rejection of their Messiah. By rejecting Christ the Jews forfeited all the blessings God had promised them. They abandoned all these blessings when they spurned Jesus as the promised Messiah (Matthew 23:13, 37-39), for these blessings find their fulfillment only in Christ (Galatians 3:16, 29).

More troubling to Paul than the lost state of his people was the suggestion that their rejection of Christ and God's consequent rejection of the Jews rendered God unfaithful to his word. It appeared that God had painted himself into a corner! Had he put himself into the position of having to renege his promises by making faith in Christ necessary for sharing in the promised blessings? Can man's lack of faith nullify the faithfulness of God (Romans 3:3)?

These issues were so important to Paul that he devotes chapters 9, 10, and 11 to their resolution. He first affirms that God's promise will be fulfilled to those to whom it actually was made, the elect of all nations (9:6-29). He then reaffirms the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ as God's way of salvation for all nations (9:30-10:17): no one, not even the Jew, can be saved apart from faith in Christ. Finally, Paul shows that Israel's present unbelief is part of God's plan for the salvation of all nations, and asserts that "all Israel will be saved" when God's plan for the world finds its fulfillment (10:18-11:36).

## ***2. Election and the sovereignty of God.***

Paul defends the faithfulness of God by affirming that not all who are Israelites by natural descent are true heirs of Abraham. God has chosen some people to receive the blessings promised to Abraham, Gentiles as well as Jews, and has passed by the rest of humankind. Those he chose before the foundation of the world are the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:14-16; Philippians 3:3), and God is faithful in keeping his promises to them. Since the rest of Abraham's natural descendants were never included within the scope of God's promises, God cannot be deemed unfaithful for not calling, justifying, and glorifying them.

Paul knows how strongly most people object to the idea that God has chosen some to be his own and not others. Would not God be unjust to favor some sinners above others? Did not Paul himself affirm that God is no respecter of persons and that he judges all by the same standard (2:6-16)? Did he not conclude that none is righteous, that all are sinners, and that none will have a word to offer on his own behalf before the judgment seat of Christ (3:9-20)? On what basis can a just and loving God choose to grant repentance and faith to some and not to others?

Paul's answer is that God exercises *sovereign grace*. Grace: God has mercy on whomever he chooses to have mercy. Sovereign: his choice depends only on his will. There are no forces or influences external to himself that make or even predispose him to choose all, many, few, or none. *No one deserves grace* or has a claim on his compassion. He did not elect some because they were worthy, for no one is worthy. He did not elect anyone on the grounds of foreseen faith or spiritual potential. Faith is his unmerited gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) and sanctification is his work (Philippians 1:6, 2:13). When God chose some to be his people before the world began he selected them to carry out his own purpose, and for no other reason we know of.

And what was and is God's purpose, according to which he elects some people and not others? The overall purpose and plan of God in this world is to reveal his own glory, wisdom, and power (9:17 and 22-23; Ephesians 3:9-11; Hebrews 6:13-18). God appoints men and women to different ends for that purpose. On the one hand, he reveals his holiness and wrath against sin by judging the evildoer (9:22; Proverbs 16:4). On the other hand, he reveals his love by having mercy on undeserving sinners (9:23 and 5:8).

For another common objection to election, and its refutation, see study note 5.

### 3. *Election and the love of God.*

If we are willing to read the inspired Word of God with an open mind we must accept election as a fact. What Christian would deny that it was God who brought him or her to repentance and faith in Christ? Who would dare to deny that, if God had not awakened us, we would still be living in unbelief and under the just condemnation of God for our sins. And what Christian would deny that many men and women who go to their graves unrepentant and unbelieving, lost forever, are no worse, perhaps even better, than we were before God spoke faith into our hearts? We have no choice but to conclude that God elected some undeserving sinners to eternal life and appointed others, no worse, to suffer justly the wrath their sins deserve.

Many earnest Christians are not satisfied with the doctrine of election. They may admit that God has the right to exercise sovereign grace, but they find it hard to accept that a loving God actually does so. If salvation is ultimately a matter of God's choice rather than man's choice, must we conclude, because all are not saved, that God's love is limited? Let men be lost because of their own choice but never because God did not love them enough to want to save them! When faced with reconciling the unbelief of some with the unlimited power of God to save, foes of the doctrine of election sometimes declare it a mystery that we can never solve.

While those who contend for the doctrine of election also admit that they do not have all the answers, they maintain that that is no reason for denying a truth that the Scripture plainly teaches and Christian experience so positively confirms. They contend that the doctrine of election is entirely consistent with the love of God for all the world. We shall see that Paul is of the same opinion. Let us patiently wait while Paul shows that the working out of God's purpose in election brings about the salvation of an innumerable host in Christ drawn from every land and people (John 12:32; Ephesians 1:9-10; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 15:4).

### 4. *Hard sayings.*

Verses 13, 17, and 22 contain statements that give people great offense. Even Christians who love and accept the Bible as God's Word may find it difficult to reconcile the all-too-clear meaning of these statements with the loving character of God revealed elsewhere in Scripture. Paul, whose vision of the love of God for all, Jews and Gentiles alike, is unequalled, had no difficulty reconciling the truths contained in these verses with God's love. Let us examine them and see whether we can understand them in a manner both straightforward and consistent with the loving character of God.

(a) "Jacob I love, but Esau I hated" (v. 13). We may not soften this verse by claiming that *bated* is a comparative term equivalent to *loved less*. While *bate* when applied to God does not connote the passions and feelings characteristic of human hatred, it certainly means more than the absence of positive love. Paul is quoting Malachi 1:3 here. When we read Malachi 1:2-5, the context of Malachi 1:3, we see that God's hatred of Esau was expressed as divine judgment on the nation of Edom, the descendants of Esau. Edom was a wicked nation and deserved everything the Lord inflicted on it. God's love for Jacob (i.e., Israel) was expressed in his merciful restoration of Israel, in spite of its sins, which were every bit as bad as those of Edom (compare Amos 1:11-12 with Amos 2:4-8). The hatred of God, expressed as punishment, is always well deserved, while his love is never deserved, but is wholly of grace.

(b) "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' So . . . he hardens whomever he wills" (vs. 17-18). Paul could have expressed himself even more strongly, for in Exodus 7:3-5 God states that he would glorify himself in the liberation of Israel from Egypt by first hardening the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let them go. God hardens hearts? Yes, God hardens hearts, as both the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus himself affirm (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew

13:13-15).

If God hardens hearts, how can an unrepentant sinner be held accountable for his or her unbelief? The sinner could not turn to God even if he or she wanted to! (The last complaint is self-refuting: someone with a hardened heart would not want to turn to God.) Let us bear in mind that when God hardens hearts he does so judicially, as punishment for sins. Paul made just that point earlier in the letter (1:28-32). While hardening Pharaoh's heart was God's means of glorifying himself more fully in Israel's redemption, that hardening was well deserved. Moreover, in hardening Pharaoh's heart God did nothing to Pharaoh that Pharaoh did not willingly concur in. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15 and 32, 9:34-35).

(c) "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" (v. 22). Taken in context (vs. 20-23) this verse suggests that God made some for the express purpose of showing his wrath and that this was his intention for them from the very beginning. This is surely the hardest saying of all! To be sure, Paul phrases the proposition hypothetically- "What if God . . . ?" Yet it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that these men and women never had a chance. God intended from before the creation of the world that they should show forth his glory by suffering wrath and destruction for their sins. If the "vessels of mercy" were elect before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), God must have made his decision regarding the "vessels of his wrath" before the foundation of the world was created. Is not this a most difficult teaching to accept?

We must not deny the implications of this verse, but we must also bear in mind that the "vessels of his wrath" *get what they deserve*. "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (1:32). Paul is not writing about ignorant or unwilling sinners! In 9:22 we see unrepentant sinners in the light of God's sovereignty and purpose; in 1:18-32 we saw them in the light of their inexcusable sin and justifiable condemnation. In 9:23 we Christians see ourselves in the light of God's sovereignty and purpose; but in 1:18-32 we are described every bit as much as the reprobate (those God has passed by). The phrases "prepared for destruction" (v. 22) and "prepared before hand for glory" (v. 23) describe people not according to their natures but according to the ends to which God has appointed them.

If "prepared for destruction" and "prepared before hand for glory" describe people as God sees them and not as we see them, we ought not to dwell too much on election except to glorify God for his mercy and sovereign grace. We cannot know who among the people we encounter in life are "vessels of mercy" and who are "vessels of his wrath." We are commanded to preach the gospel to everyone in the hope that God will grant repentance and faith to those we address, in the confidence that none of the elect will fail to obtain the grace of God.

### ***5. Elect unto service or unto salvation?***

Some commentators view God's choice of Israel very differently than the interpretation presented here. They assert that Israel was elect (chosen) by God for service, not for salvation. In their view God chose Israel to carry out his work in the world: to be his witness to the nations, to execute judgment on the earth, to bring justice to the people, and to make God known throughout all the lands. God set the people of Israel apart from other nations to be his servant to them. This, they claim, is what election is about, not predestining some to be saved and leaving the rest of mankind to perish in their sins.

There is plenty of Scripture to back up the contention that God chose Israel to be his servant. Isaiah bears especially rich testimony to this truth (to begin with, see Isaiah 41:8-10, 42:1-7, 43:10, 44:1-5 and 21, 44:1-6). But the Lord's choice of Israel to be his servant is not the election Paul is affirming in Romans 9, as can be seen from the following considerations:

(a) Paul makes a distinction within Israel between the natural children and the children of promise



(v. 8). Only the latter are elect, and they are but a remnant of the whole people (v. 27).

(b) The election in view in chapter 9 has as its purpose the manifestation of God's glory in showing mercy to the elect rather than in the service rendered by the elect (vs. 16-18, 23).

(c) The elect include Gentiles as well as Jews (v. 24)

(d) The theory that the election spoken of here is Israel's election unto service actually supports the charge to which Paul is responding in chapters 9-11, the charge that Israel's unbelief renders God unfaithful to his Word. If God had declared Israel to be his servant for the purpose of bringing blessings to the whole world, what does Israel's unfaithfulness do to that purpose? Did God make a poor choice in the election of Israel to carry out that task?

The fact of the matter is that the true Servant of the Lord is not the whole nation of Israel, but Jesus Christ (Zechariah 3:8; Matthew 20:28; John 10:11-14; Acts 3:26 and 4:27). The servant passages in Isaiah become increasingly personal and individual as one proceeds from Isaiah 40 to Isaiah 53. In Isaiah 49:5-6 we read that the Servant is not the nation but an individual who will redeem both Israel and the Gentile nations. In Isaiah 52:13-53:12 we learn that the Servant suffers and dies as an offering for the sins of the many. The elect Servant of the Lord is not the entire people of Israel; he is the one and only descendant of Abraham who proved true to the covenant by his perfect obedience to the law of God, Jesus Christ.

The identification of Jesus Christ as the elect Servant of the Lord is a precious truth, but it is not the subject of Romans 9. The election Paul speaks of there is God's choice of some to be heirs of salvation according to his sovereign, gracious will. The meaning of Romans 9 is clear in its meaning and should be taken in its natural, unforced sense. That meaning should not be distorted or denied because the natural mind of man (the "old self" of the Christian) rebels against it.

**LESSON 13. Romans 9:30-10:21*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. The Jews sought righteousness, but most of them failed to obtain it. Why? *vs. 9:30-10:3.*
2. Has Paul written off Israel? Has he consigned them to the wrath of God? *v. 10:1*
3. What human action is involved in discovering and appropriating God's way of being justified? *vs. 4-5*
4. How can an individual make sure that he or she is one of the elect, one of those God calls a vessel of mercy? *vs. 9-12*
5. What prevents men from calling on the Lord? *vs. 16-18*
6. What can we do to awaken faith in the unconverted? *v. 17*
7. Can anyone plead ignorance as an excuse for not responding to the gospel? Explain. *v. 18*
8. What was Israel's attitude toward the gospel and toward the fact that the Gentiles had accepted it? *vs. 19-21*

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. The Jews sought righteousness, but most of them failed to obtain it. Why? vs. 9:30-10:3.**

The Jews pursued a righteousness based on works of the law rather than a righteousness based on faith in Christ. They sought to establish their *own* righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness that God provides.

### **2. Has Paul written off Israel? Has he consigned them to the wrath of God? v. 10:1**

No. He prays to God for their salvation.

### **3. What human action is involved in discovering and appropriating God's way of being justified? vs. 4-5**

(a) One must *believe* the facts of the gospel, especially the truth that God raised Jesus from the dead, for that act validated the entire gospel message (1:4; see also Acts 12:31, 1 Corinthians 15:1-20).

(b) One must *confess* Jesus Christ as Lord (Greek: *Kurios*, which in the Greek version of the Old Testament and in the New Testament means Jehovah, God Almighty; see Lesson 1, study note 4).

### **4. How can an individual make sure that he or she is one of the elect, one of those God calls a vessel of mercy? vs. 9-12**

One has only to *call upon him*. God will save everyone, Jew or Gentile, who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10-11; 2 Peter 1:10).

### **5. What prevents men from calling on the Lord? vs. 10-14**

People do not call on him because they do not believe in him.

### **6. What can we do to awaken faith in the unconverted? v. 17**

We can preach and teach the word of Christ. The gospel message creates its own faith: faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the preaching of Christ.

### **7. Can anyone plead ignorance as an excuse for not responding to the gospel? Explain. v. 18**

No one can plead ignorance. "All the earth" has heard. Paul is referring to Jews scattered throughout the known world. The essentials of the gospel were proclaimed in the Old Testament. Israel had no excuse for not recognizing and believing in Jesus as the Christ (see study note 4).

### **8. What was Israel's attitude toward the gospel and toward the fact that the Gentiles had accepted it? vs. 19-21**

Israel was envious and angry (v. 19), disobedient and obstinate (v. 21).

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. *Righteousness by faith: a stumbling stone.*

In chapter 9 Paul explained Israel's failure to accept Jesus as Messiah from the perspective of God's eternal purpose. Only part of Israel was truly Israel, only a remnant of the people was elect. Now, in 9:30-10:21, he explains Israel's rejection of Christ from a different perspective. It is the means God ordained for the salvation of men and women from all nations.

Paul's Jewish kinsmen stubbornly refused to accept God's righteousness in Christ, a righteousness received by faith. Instead, they insisted on pursuing a righteousness they could call their own, a righteousness based on works of the law.

In 10:3 Paul attributes Israel's quest for righteousness based on the law to ignorance, but in 10:16-21 he states that their ignorance was willful. The Jews had reason to know that they could not please God by keeping the law; nevertheless, they refused to submit to God's way of righteousness. Righteousness in Christ was and remains a "stumbling stone" to Jews (9:32).

The Jews had every reason to know that their privileges and standing with God as his own people were entirely due to his grace and mercy. The history of Israel was one of continual redemption from oppression brought on by the people's sins. Although reward or punishment was contingent on obedience or disobedience to God's law (Leviticus 26:3-39; Deuteronomy 28), Israel's status as God's people was not contingent on their actions. Rather, it was based on the free, loving choice of the Lord of all the earth (Exodus 34:6-7; Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 4:25-40, 5:12-19, 7:6-16).

Faith in the promises of God has been the means by which God's elect have laid hold of his forgiveness and his own righteousness ever since God called Abraham out of idolatry in Mesopotamia (Genesis 12:1-4, 15:1-6; Galatians 3:6-9). God gave the law to Israel 430 years *after* Abraham and only *after* he had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. He gave Israel the law as a constant reminder of their need for his righteousness (Galatians 3:17-19).

God promised forgiveness to the transgressor who offered the sacrifices required by the law in a spirit of repentance and faith. The sacrifices and feasts prescribed by the law spoke clearly of the Messiah to come (Hebrews 8:3-6, 9:1-28). God's people were *never* supposed to view the law as a means of establishing their own righteousness. The law was intended to show Israel how the Lord's redeemed covenant people were to serve their Savior, to make them know their own sinfulness, and to offer them forgiveness in sacrifices that were *types* or figures of the One who was to come.

We may think it natural that the Jews would consider their obedience to be their righteousness. The scriptures sometime speak that way (Leviticus 18; Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11, 21). But sinful human nature finds its strength in the law and works all kinds of sin our lives (7:7-24; also 1 Corinthians 15:56). The spiritually honest Jew knew that he or she was a sinner and was thus driven to plead for the mercy of God promised in the law (Psalm 51:1-9; Isaiah 6:5-7). For the Jews to persist in seeking their own righteousness by works of the law was pride, stubbornness, and willful ignorance.

Our unbelieving Gentile friends, relations, and neighbors are no different in their obstinacy than the Jews of Paul's day. We were the same before we came to Christ. We all found our righteousness in our own good works, and we all ignored the manifest evidence of our inherent sinfulness and corruption until God called us through the message of the gospel.

### 2. *Believing and confessing Christ.*

"It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Astonished multitudes will enter hell with that lie on their lips. The truth is that the faith that saves has a specific content and a definite object. In 10:5-13 Paul reiterates the content of saving faith. It is faith in Jesus Christ as God come in the flesh, as the One God raised from the dead when he had finished his work of redemption, as the One who proved himself to be the Lord, our God, and our Master. The faith is the same faith that

saved God's people in ancient times (see study note 1).

The faith that saves is also a faith that is confessed before men. Deuteronomy 30:11-14 refers to the word of salvation as being on the lips of God's people as well as in their hearts. Paul does not pass over this point: we are saved by *believing* and *confessing* Jesus Christ. Up to this point he has stressed faith in Christ. Now he seems to add a new element, verbal confession, as a requirement for salvation. Does this additional element contradict Paul's earlier emphasis on faith alone?

When Paul insists that "it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (10:10) he asserts no more than what the Lord Jesus himself said (Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Genuine saving faith will confess Christ, just as genuine saving faith will gladly be baptized (Acts 2:38), love its brother (1 John 2:9-10), hate the world (1 John 2:15), and be separate from a life of sin (1 John 3:6). The same Holy Spirit who kindles faith in our hearts moves us to confess Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:2-3).

### **3. "Faith comes from hearing" (10:17).**

How can we get someone to believe the gospel? Most of us have loved ones and friends who do not have faith in Christ. We would compel them to believe the gospel if only we could, but how? What creates faith in Christ?

Paul states that the source of faith in the gospel message is the hearing of that message itself (10:17). The word of Christ is self-authenticating: the Holy Spirit works conviction in the hearts of the elect as they hear the message. The word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), for it pierces our hearts and shows us our true selves (Hebrews 4:12). More than that, the Holy Spirit uses the word as the means of grace to create faith in Christ in the sinner's heart and to increase the faith of the believer.

We do well to argue for the truth of the scriptures, to advance the best arguments we can muster for the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible in seeking to convert others of the truth of its message. Yet in the last analysis, the Holy Spirit speaking through the word itself is what convinces and convicts hearts. Our primary responsibility is to proclaim the word. We are to plant and water the seed (1 Corinthians 3:6-7), leaving it to God to make the seed grow by its own power (Mark 4:1-20). Even if we cannot answer all the questions and objections thrown at us, we are to speak the word of Christ anyway. That word gets in among them in spite of their most careful defenses and works faith in their hearts. *It is Christ himself who speaks through the Word.*

### **4. "Did they not hear?" (10:18)**

In 10:18 Paul seems to say that the whole world had heard the gospel message by the time of his writing. We know that this could not have been his meaning, for in 15:20 he will say that his goal is to preach the gospel where Christ has never been proclaimed, and he also states that he has much work yet to do (15:24 ff). What can he mean, then, in 10:18?

Paul is not referring to the fact that the whole world has some knowledge of God through natural revelation, that is, from contemplating the created world. It is true enough that the witness of nature and of conscience leaves humankind without excuse (see Lesson 2, study notes 3 and 7). The fact that Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 here might seem to indicate that he has natural revelation in mind, since Psalm 19:1-4 celebrates the revelation of God in nature. Nevertheless, we must reject this interpretation. Paul has been writing of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, of saving faith. Nature does not reveal Jesus Christ as God come down from heaven, as God made flesh and crucified for our sins, as the risen Lord.

Paul's reference in 10:18 is to the Jews. We must bear in mind that chapters 9, 10, and 11 are concerned with Israel's unbelief. Let us note that vs. 18 and 19 are parallel verses. Verse 19 refers to Israel; v. 18 must also refer to Israel. The phrases "all the earth" and "the ends of the world" in v. 18

should be understood as referring to the *Diaspora*, the Jews living outside Palestine. In 10:14-21 we may picture Paul as arguing with the same imaginary opponent who defended the Jews in 3:1-8 (see Lesson 3, study note 2). This time the objection is that God cannot blame his people for not believing in Jesus as their Messiah since they have never even heard of Jesus. How can they call on him of whom they have never heard? “Unless your Jesus sends a messenger to preach to them, Paul, how can one find fault?”

Paul’s answer is that his kinsmen *have* heard of the righteousness of faith in Jesus Christ, no matter where under heaven they live. Practicing Jews have the Old Testament scriptures, which proclaim the coming of the Messiah and righteousness by faith so clearly that they have no excuse. Paul’s quotation of Psalm 19 is significant: the law of the Lord, the word of God, reveals God and his way of righteousness with sufficient clarity to bring life to the soul (Psalm 19:7).

Yes, even those Jews who lived far from Palestine and were unfamiliar with the life and teachings of Jesus had a scriptural witness to the righteousness by faith based on the coming, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. Yet Israel, having heard the truth, rejected it and persisted in seeking to establish their own righteousness by works of the law (see study note 1). Furthermore, as Paul discovered when he preached the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews resented that the gospel found a hearing among the heathen, and opposed him at every turn (Acts 13:44-50, 14:1-6, 17:1-13, 18:12, 20:2, 21:27-28). Except for a remnant chosen by grace, the Jews refused to enter the kingdom of heaven themselves and hindered others from entering (Matthew 23:37; Luke 11:52).

**LESSON 14. Romans 11:1-36*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Has God rejected Israel? Justify your answer. *vs. 1-6.*
2. In the final analysis, what has kept the mass of Jews from receiving the gospel? *vs. 7-10*
3. What is God's purpose in hardening most of Israel? *vs. 11-12.*
4. What has resulted from the unbelief of the Jew? *vs. 12, 30-32*
5. What has resulted from the salvation of the Gentiles? *vs. 14, 19*
6. What will result at last from the jealousy of Israel? *vs. 15-16, 26, 31*
7. Paul warns against an attitude that Gentile Christians might harbor toward the Jews. *vs. 17-24*
  - (a) What is that attitude?
  - (b) Why is it *wrong*?
  - (c) Why is it *dangerous*?
8. What secret does Paul reveal to his readers? *vs. 25-32*
9. Why does he reveal this secret? *vs. 23, 33-36*

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. Has God rejected Israel? Justify your answer. vs. 1-6.**

No God has not rejected his ancient people (1 Samuel 12:22; Jeremiah 31:37). Paul cites four reasons for his confidence:

- (a) He is an Israelite himself, of the tribe of Benjamin.
- (b) God *foreknew* Israel. Those God foreknew and chose before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) are sure to be saved (Romans 8:28-30).
- (c) The history of Israel shows that God preserves a remnant for himself even when it appears to human eyes that his people have irrevocably rejected him.
- (d) There was a remnant of believing Jews in Paul's day, as there is in our day, saved by grace through faith in Christ.

### **2. In the final analysis, what has kept the mass of Jews from receiving the gospel? vs. 7-10**

God has hardened them. He has made their minds dull and their eyes blind to spiritual truth. This hardening is judicial, a punishment for their sins (1:28), but it is also intended to further God's purpose in the world.

### **3. What is God's purpose in hardening most of Israel? vs. 11-12.**

God intends to use Israel's unbelief to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

### **4. What has resulted from the unbelief of the Jew? vs. 12, 30-32**

Paul turned to the Gentiles, and many of them have believed the gospel and received mercy and salvation. This is the result God intended.

### **5. What has resulted from the salvation of the Gentiles? vs. 14, 19**

The Jews have been made jealous (see Acts 17:5).

### **6. What will result at last from the jealousy of Israel? vs. 15-16, 26, 31**

The Jews as a people will again receive mercy and be saved.

### **7. Paul warns against an attitude that Gentile Christians might harbor toward the Jews. vs. 17-24**

#### **(a) What is that attitude?**

Pride and conceit.

#### **(b) Why is it *wrong*?**

In addition to the fact that pride and conceit are sins, such pride is wrong because Gentile Christians have not been saved *instead* of Israel, but rather *as part* of Israel. The church is not God's new people; rather, it is God's ancient people into which individual Gentiles have been incorporated by faith.

#### **(c) Why is it *dangerous*?**

We stand only through faith. We must continue in faith to receive the promise (Hebrews 3:4). Pride is a threat to faith. It puts us in danger of falling into sin and can lead to spiritual destruction (Proverbs 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11:12; James 4:6-7).



**8. What secret does Paul reveal to his readers? vs. 25-32**

Only part of Israel has been hardened, and that only for a limited time. God intends the hardening of Israel to result in the salvation of Gentiles. When the full number of elect Gentiles are saved, God will save all Israel (Revelation 7:1-12)

**9. Why does he reveal this secret? vs. 23, 33-36**

- (a) Paul wants to squelch any conceit on the part of his Gentile readers.
- (b) Paul wants his readers to perceive (in some measure) the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge, so that they may join him in adoration and praise of God for his plan of salvation.

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. *What is at stake: the faithfulness of God.*

Most of Israel rejected God's way of righteousness through faith in Christ. Yet Israel's unbelief was entirely within the operation of God's sovereign grace. God chose to have mercy on a few, opening their eyes to the truth and granting them faith in Christ, while he passed by most, hardening them in their sins and leaving them to the futile pursuit of a righteousness based on works of the law.

When we contemplate God's sovereign grace and Israel's rejection of Christ at the same time, we may wonder whether God has rejected Israel as Israel has rejected him. Has he cast Israel off forever? Has he chosen a new people, the church, to replace his first people? If so, what does this change in God's purpose imply regarding his faithfulness - and our security? And if God has not rejected Israel, why has he hardened all but a few of them in unbelief?

What is at stake, in Paul's view, is nothing less than the faithfulness of God. Paul entirely vindicates the faithfulness of God as he brings this section of Romans to a close. He shows that God has not rejected Israel, that their unbelief is working toward the salvation of the Gentiles, and that finally "all Israel will be saved" (11:26).

### 2. *The remnant.*

One reason for Paul's faith that God has not rejected Israel is the existence of a faithful remnant. Although Israel as a whole has rejected Christ and God's way of righteousness through faith in him, a small number of Jews have accepted Jesus as their Messiah and trust in him alone as their righteousness. These faithful Israelites constitute the remnant.

The concept of a *remnant* is not Paul's brainchild. It is found throughout the Old Testament. God warned Israel in the wilderness that he would reduce them to few in number if they did not obey his voice (Deuteronomy 28:62), and the history of Israel proved God true to his word. Paul cites the case of Elijah, who believed himself to be the only faithful survivor of King Ahab's cruel persecutions. God informed Elijah that he had reserved for himself a remnant of 7000 men who had not bowed down to the false god Baal (1 Kings 19:9-10, 13-14, 18). Later, during the reign of King Hezekiah, only a remnant of Jews survived the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:4, 30-31). Later still, only a small band of Jews returned to Palestine after they had been captives in Babylon for 70 years (Ezra 9:8). The prophets had also affirmed on various occasions that God would preserve only a remnant of his people (Isaiah 1:9, 10:22, and 11:11; Jeremiah 3:14, 5:18, 23:3, 31:7, and 44:28; Ezekiel 6:8; Amos 5:3; Micah 2:12; Zephaniah 2:7 and 3:13; Zechariah 8:12). In all these instances Israel deserved complete destruction for her sins. Only because of his covenant love did God preserve even a remnant of the people.

The Greek word for remnant is derived from a verb meaning *leave* or *leave behind*. A remnant is a pitifully small portion of the whole, the "leavings" of the people. Is God satisfied with the leftovers of Israel? Not at all. The history of Israel and the Word of God show that God claims the whole people of Israel. The preservation of a remnant was always seen as a promise that someday God would reclaim and restore the whole nation. The remnant is not God's full portion, it is the first fruits of a full harvest, the earnest of his inheritance.

Through Moses God promised that he would make them numerous again if they would repent and turn to him (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). God revealed to Elijah that better days were in store for Israel under the prophetic ministry of Elisha and the kingship of Jehu (1 Kings 19:16-17). As for the remnant of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, God promised that it would survive the Assyrian siege and then go forth, be established in the land, and increase (2 Kings 19:30-31). The remnant that returned from exile in Babylon believed that God would bless them if they repented and reformed their lives according to his law (Ezra 10:2-4; Nehemiah 9-11). Their hope was in accord with the

teaching of the prophets, who prophesied of the restoration of a great number of Israelites following the time of a tiny remnant (Isaiah 26:15, 44:1-5, 45:25, 40:14-21, 54:2-3, 56:8, and 60:21-22; Jeremiah 3:16, 30:19, and 33:22; Ezekiel 37:26; Micah 4:6-7; Zechariah 8:48, 10:8-10, and 11:13)

Paul's view of the remnant is in complete agreement with the Old Testament teaching about it. "At the present time" (v. 5) only a remnant cleaves to God, but in God's good time "all Israel will be saved." The existence of a remnant confirms that God will once again stretch forth his hand and save the great majority of Jews.

### ***3. Why only a remnant?***

It is God's fixed purpose to save all Israel (11:26), yet at the present time he has chosen to save only an elect remnant. God's act of election serves his eternal purpose (9:11), but what is that purpose? Why doesn't God save all Israel now? Why only a remnant now?

In chapter 11 Paul discloses to us as much as God has chosen to reveal. Briefly, God's purpose is to bring salvation to the Gentiles through the unbelief of the Jews. Then, in God's own time, when the full number of elect Gentiles have come to faith in Christ, he will remove the hardening of Israel and the Jews will recognize and accept their Messiah. God intended the unbelief of the Jews to advance the salvation of the Gentiles; he intends the faith of the Gentiles to lead to the salvation of the Jews.

But that is not all. The salvation of the great mass of Israelites will bring blessing to the world that Paul describes as "life from the dead" (v. 15). Perhaps he is referring to the resurrection. This would imply that Christ will return to judge the world immediately after Israel is converted. Perhaps he is referring to the millennium. Since Paul does not expand on the phrase "life from the dead," we may not use Romans 11 to support any particular theory of eschatology (*eschatology*: the doctrine of the last things, i.e., the return of Christ, the judgment, the end of the world, and the eternal state of the righteous and the wicked.) Whatever Paul means by "life from the dead," he certainly affirms that the Gentiles will be blessed far more by the salvation of Israel than by Israel's fall.

### ***4. Israel and the church.***

Paul reaffirms an Old Testament theme when he teaches that the Gentiles will be blessed through and along with Israel (11:11-12, 15, 17-18). God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed in him (Genesis 18:18). This promise was repeated in the Psalms (45:1-12, 47, and 67; 68:28-32, 72:1-11 and 17, 86:9, 96:7-13, 98:3-4 and 9, 100:1, and 138:4-5). The prophets also told of God blessing the Gentiles through Abraham: (Isaiah 11:1-10, 25:6-8, 27:6, 42:1-7, 45:22-23, 51:4-5, 55:3-5, 60:3-4 ff., and 66:18-20). Other prophets told of the blessing of the nations through Israel: (Daniel 7:27; Amos 9:11-12; Micah 7:16-17; Zephaniah 3:9-10 and 19-20; Zechariah 8:11-13, 22-23 and 14:9, 16).

However, the Old Testament did not reveal the manner in which the Gentiles would be blessed in Abraham. The manner of their blessing, which Paul calls a mystery unknown in previous generations (Ephesians 3:4-6), is that Gentiles are made full members of God's people Israel. They are part of the same body, grafted into the same olive tree as the natural born descendants of Abraham who share the faith of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9, 14, 26-29; Ephesians 1:9-10, 2:17-19, 3:4-6).

This truth was indeed a mystery before the Holy Spirit revealed it to the apostles and prophets of the apostolic age (Acts 15:7-29; Ephesians 3:4-6). The Jews expected that the Gentiles would be separate and unequal - inferior recipients of whatever blessings the Old Testament promised them. The Law of Moses made provision for Gentile converts to the faith of Israel (Numbers 9:14; Deuteronomy 23:8), and the Pharisees of Jesus' day carried out an extensive missionary enterprise (see Matthew 23:15). Yet no Jew expected that Gentile converts would ever outnumber natural-born Jews. Paul, however, boldly teaches that a great number of Gentiles will be saved and grafted into the very same body of which believing Jews are members. In short, Paul teaches that the church and

God's true Israel are one and the same body (Galatians 6:16).

Unhappily, this wonderful truth is still a mystery in wide sections of the church today. Worse, it is consciously rejected by many Christians. A common, erroneous view is that the church is a *new, second people* of God, distinct and different from his ancient people Israel. According to this theory, a central part of *dispensationalism*, God has made different promises to Israel and the church, has ordained them to different destinies. Israel has been promised an earthly kingdom, with Jesus ruling over all the nations of the earth from Jerusalem, while the church has been promised a purely spiritual reign with Christ in heaven.

Those who hold the dispensational view usually maintain that many Old Testament prophecies relating to Israel's restoration, prosperity, and worldwide dominion under the Messiah do not find their fulfillment in the salvation of the church and the worldwide spread of the gospel in the present age. The latter is the classical, historical interpretation of Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Instead, adherents of this erroneous teaching believe that those prophecies await fulfillment in a future age, since the Jews remain almost completely unreconciled to Christ in the present church age. Dispensationalists maintain that Israel must be separate and distinct from Christ's church if God's promises to Israel are to be fulfilled literally.

The classical Protestant and Roman Catholic reply is that the *New Testament* identifies the church as God's Israel; hence, we should read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and seek the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Admittedly, interpreters differ regarding the precise manner in which these prophecies concerning Israel have been, are being, or shall be fulfilled in the past, present, and future life of the church.. (Will there be a 1000 year millennium? Will Christ return before or after the millennium?) However, those who regard Israel and the church as two different peoples have more serious difficulties than simple differences of interpretation. They are compelled time and again to twist the scriptures' natural meaning. Most damaging to their position, of course, is the clear teaching of such passages as Romans 11.

### **5. "all Israel will be saved" (11:26).**

Paul explains in 11:1-24 that the present unbelief of Israel is part of God's plan for the salvation of elect Gentiles. In vs. 1-24 he also implies that God intends to gather fallen Israel to himself once he has accomplished his purpose for the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). As he concludes his argument in vs. 25-32 he states explicitly what he implied in vs. 1-24: when the full number of Gentiles has come in, "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26).

Most commentators have taken the phrase "all Israel will be saved" to mean that God will remove Israel's blindness and hardness of heart some day and convert the great majority of Jews to Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-26 ff.) Other commentators, however, understand "all Israel" to mean the full number of the elect, Jew and Gentiles, since the church is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). They believe the phrase "all Israel will be saved" has nothing to say about the future conversion of the Jews.

A careful reading of Romans 9-11 shows that here Paul has been using the word Israel to mean the Jewish people, whatever wider meaning he may attach to it in other writings. We have seen that the preservation of a believing remnant of Jews guarantees the salvation of the mass of the Jewish people (study notes 2 and 3). We may safely conclude with the majority of commentators that some day the Jews as a people will turn to Jesus in faith as their Messiah.

When will the conversion of the Jews be realized? Romans 11 gives no answer, except that it will happen after the full number of elect Gentiles from every nation have been saved.

### ***5. The unsearchable ways of God.***

Human reason would never have surmised that Israel's refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ was part of God's plan to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Neither does the world believe that God will turn all Israel to Christ some day. But even Christians, who know the character, promises, and prophecies of God through the Bible and the witness of the Spirit would never have guessed that God purposed both the fall and rising again of Israel for the salvation of the world. *His ways are unsearchable.*

The world will not, cannot acknowledge that God is actively at work in and through all things to accomplish his purposes in the world. Even believers, who gladly confess the workings of sovereign grace in their lives, sometimes fail to recognize God's control over the actions of unbelievers. And even when we acknowledge by faith that God is at work in current events we generally cannot see how those events serve to bring about God's announced ends. *His ways are unsearchable.*

Paul concludes this section of Romans with praise. God has lifted the curtain enough for us to see that even in the most tragic event of history, Israel's rejection of their Messiah, God was at work to fulfill his plans and purposes. He is faithful to his people Israel. His love embraces all nations. He is in complete control. Though his ways are unsearchable, he has made them known to us so that we may praise and glorify him for his faithfulness, love, power, and unsearchable wisdom. Praise the Lord!

#### *IV. CHRISTIAN LIVING*

**LESSON 15. Romans 12:1-21*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What is a sacrifice? *Exodus 20:24; Leviticus 1:7-9; Deuteronomy 12:27*
2. What does it mean to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices”? *v. 1; also 6:12-13, 8:1-14*
3. How can we know what is “the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”? *12:2*
4. What are the characteristics of a renewed, transformed mind? *vs. 6-13*
5. What relationship do Christians have to one another? To what does Paul compare our relationship?  
*vs. 4-5*
6. Why does God give us gifts? *vs. 6-8*
7. What are we to do with the gifts God has given us? *vs. 6-8*
8. How can you find out what your gifts are? *v. 3*
9. What motivates us to use the gifts we have received? *vs. 1-5*
10. What hinders us from using these gifts? *vs. 3b, 6b*
11. What attitudes are we to cultivate toward fellow Christians”? *vs. 9-13; also Galatians 5:19-26*

12. What attitudes are we to cultivate toward our neighbors, Christian or not? *vs. 13-21*

13. Can we expect to get along well with our neighbors and our fellow Christians when we live according to Paul's admonitions? *vs. 14-21*



## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. What is a sacrifice? Exodus 20:24; Leviticus 1:7-9; Deuteronomy 12:27**

A sacrifice is a gift or life offered to God. It must be without defect or blemish (Malachi 1:8).

### **2. What does it mean to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices”? v. 1; also 6:12-13, 8:1-14**

We are to live for God, not for ourselves or for anyone or anything else. We are to consider our old selves dead and our new selves holy and acceptable to God through the cleansing blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:5). We live for God by seeking to know and do “the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

### **3. How can we know what is “the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”? 12:2**

Our minds must be transformed from conformity to this world and its way of looking at things to conformity to God’s viewpoint (Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:10 and 17).

### **4. What are the characteristics of a renewed, transformed mind? vs. 6-13**

- (a) It is not conceited. We ought not to think more highly of ourselves than is warranted.
- (b) It is objective about one’s self. We ought to view ourselves with “sober judgment” (v. 3).
- (c) It has faith in one’s ability to serve the Lord and his church. We ought to see ourselves as gifted by God in some way for the benefit of the church.

### **5. What relationship do Christians have to one another? To what does Paul compare our relationship? vs. 4-5**

We are *members* of one another in the original sense of the word *members*, that is, we are limbs and organs of the same body. We all belong to the church of Christ, which Paul elsewhere describes as his body (Ephesians 5:23). We have different gifts and abilities from God to use for the good of all the members, individually and collectively. We are to live in submission to the head of the body, Jesus Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

### **6. Why does God give us gifts? vs. 6-8**

God is gracious to us. He delights to show his favor to us and to do us good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

### **7. What are we to do with the gifts God has given us? vs. 6-8**

We are to use them, not for personal ends, but for the benefit of the church and the glory of God.

### **8. How can you find out what your gifts are? v. 3**

Think realistically and objectively about your abilities. Be neither conceited, thinking more highly of yourself than you ought, nor lacking faith to recognize that God has given you gifts. Seek the insight of mature Christians whose wisdom, knowledge, and leadership you know to be of God (v. 8, also 1 Corinthians 12:5). They may be able to help you identify your gifts (see study note 3).

### **9. What motivates us to use the gifts we have received? vs. 1-5**

- (a) The desire to live for God and not for self, that is, to be a “living sacrifice.”
- (b) The faith that we do have gifts and that we can live a holy, God-pleasing life; the conviction that we can know God’s will and do it.

### **10. What hinders us from using these gifts? vs. 3b, 6b**

- (a) Self-centeredness: preoccupation with our own interests.

(b) Weak faith: the inability or unwillingness to believe that we have received gifts from God for the benefit of his church, that we can know God's will, or that he will empower us to do his will.

**11. What attitudes are we to cultivate toward fellow Christians? vs. 9-13; also Galatians 5:19-26**

- (a) Love that is genuine and sincere.
- (b) Hatred of evil: the desire to see the church pure and holy.
- (c) Prizing the good: seeking the good of the church and the cause of Christ.
- (d) Loving devotion to our brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- (e) Striving to honor other believers.
- (f) Zeal for Christ and his kingdom that cannot be extinguished.
- (g) Being fervent in spirit as we serve Christ.
- (h) Joy and hope in Christ.
- (i) Faithfulness in prayer for God's people.
- (j) Patience in affliction suffered for Christ.
- (k) Sharing what we have with brothers and sisters in need.
- (l) Seeking occasions to show hospitality to brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- (m) Sympathy, or fellow-feeling: rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn.
- (n) Harmony: striving to get along in peace with fellow Christians.
- (o) Humility: willingness to associate with those of low status or position.

As we read vs. 9-13 we should bear in mind that:

- (a) The Greek words denoting attitudes and practices in these verses are translated quite differently in various English versions in common use today.
- (b) The attitudes and practices commended here have reference to our relations with other Christians, in other words, to life in the family of God. For example, although we are to hate all evil, v. 9 refers primarily to evil in the church.

**12. What attitudes are we to cultivate toward our neighbors, Christian or not? vs. 13-21**

In addition to the attitudes and practices listed in answer 11, we are to seek to live at peace with unbelievers. We must avoid strife as much as lies in our power. Moreover, we are neither to avenge ourselves when wronged or to wish ill to those who mistreat or hate us; rather, we are to do good to those who do us ill and pray for them (Matthew 5:38-48). We are to do what is good in the sight of all people, i.e., to observe commonly acknowledged standards of courtesy, decency, charity and social behavior as long as these standards do not conflict with the law of God.

**13. Can we expect to get along well with our neighbors and our fellow Christians when we live according to Paul's admonitions? vs. 14-21**

We will avoid most strife with unbelievers when we live a life pleasing to the Lord, at least in our country (Some Muslim countries may be a different story). Still, we cannot avoid all strife. Some trouble is inevitable precisely because we seek to live godly lives for Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:11-12 and 43-44; John 15:18-21; 2 Timothy 2:8; 1 Peter 3:10-14).

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. *Living for God.*

Having proclaimed all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us in chapters 1-11, Paul now turns to what we should do and how we should live in chapters 12-16. As we study these chapters we should bear in mind that they not only *follow* chapters 1-11, they *follow from* those earlier chapters.

What God has done for us is the foundation of what we should do for God. “Therefore” (v. 1), because of everything related in chapters 1-11, what follows is our “spiritual worship” The Greek phrase rendered *spiritual worship* in the ESV is better translated *logical, reasonable, or rational service*. It follows logically from the fact that we have received the mercy of God. *Because* we are dead to sin and alive to God (6:11-13), *because* we are dead to the Law (7:4-6), *because* we are no longer in the flesh and are no longer controlled by our old sinful nature (8:9-11), and *because* God is faithful and will keep us to the end, *therefore* we can and must live a new life for God, knowing that losing our life for his sake is actually saving it (Mark 8:35; also 2 Corinthians 5:15-17).

### 2. *Members of one body.*

The radical reorientation of our thinking for which Paul calls in v. 2 has two aspects. The first is the realization that living for God is the service we logically owe him as the result of our salvation (study note 1). The second is the consciousness that we do not exist and live as isolated, individual believers. We are members of one another. We all belong to a single spiritual body whose head is Christ (v. 5; see also 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 4:4, 15-16). The service we owe God is not merely a matter of our personal relationship with him; it is also a matter of our relationship to other believers. The truth that we are members of the same body was implicit in chapter 11, where Paul likens us to the branches of a single olive tree. In chapter 12 he addresses this truth explicitly and expounds its implications for Christian living.

Viewing ourselves and other believers as members of one another is the fruit of a renewed mind. The worldly mind, the old nature, is egocentric and individualistic to a fault, at least in the Western world. Our society promotes *individual* rights, *personal* achievement, *personal* development, *self*-actualization, *self* expression, and rugged *individualism*. Even the group values we prize, such as cooperation and majority rule, are directed towards maximizing individual freedom and well-being. .

People living in traditional and collectivist societies are equally conformed to the world. Men and women may be less individualistic in such societies, but their loyalty is to the family, clan, state, or some other social unit based on natural or man-made principles and not on spiritual unity in Christ.

Christians, on the other hand, are called to view themselves as members of a spiritual body. All who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ are citizens of God’s commonwealth, members of his people Israel (Ephesians 2:10; see also Lesson 14, study note 4). We may have few or no natural bonds or common interests uniting us. Paul’s original readers represented the most diverse backgrounds - some were slaves and some were masters, some were foreigners and others native Romans, some were Jews and some were Gentiles. Yet they all had one thing in common, Christ and the blessings found in him.

Sadly, Protestants have largely lost sight of the truth that all God’s people constitute a single spiritual body whose members are members of one another. We show our lack of consciousness in many ways: by our propensity to split and divide and remain separate from one another for reasons far removed from the essentials of the faith; by the fact that our churches rarely cross social, economic, or racial lines; by our failure to use the gifts God has given us for the benefit of our brothers and sisters (see study note 3), or even to care very much about their welfare. Finally, we show our lack of consciousness of the one body of Christ by failing to seek the fruit of our brothers’ and sisters’ gifts. If we were fully aware of being members of one another we would know that we cannot

progress very far in our sanctification without each other's help, and we would make every effort to maintain and strengthen peace, unity of mind, and cooperation in the body of Christ.

### 3. *Spiritual gifts.*

Paul means to stress two truths when he likens us to the limbs and organs of a body. The first, discussed in study note 2, is that we are members of one another. We are so related to each other that we cannot live for God without taking notice of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The second truth conveyed by the metaphor of the body with its limbs and organs is that we have been given different functions in the church, different ways of serving Christ. The parts of the body are different, yet the body remains one and the parts all act together to promote the good of the body. We have different functions to carry out, yet we all work together toward a common end.

The abilities that enable us to carry out different functions are gifts from God's indwelling Holy Spirit, not natural abilities that unbelievers may also possess. When we look at other Bible passages (1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11) we see that our gifts are all manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Since Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, these gifts are possessed only by believers.

Comparing Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4, we see that the list of gifts in Romans 12 is not exhaustive or complete. Indeed, there is no reason to think that these passages taken together list all the spiritual gifts God in his grace gives the church. On the other hand, comparing these passages indicates that certain gifts are more important for the church than others. Apostles, prophets, and teachers are mentioned more frequently and are given a more prominent place than, say, the gift of tongues.

The question of whether all the gifts mentioned in the New Testament are perennial is not answered in these passages, but we can safely conclude on other grounds that apostleship, prophecy, and the miraculous gifts have ceased. By their very nature they were foundational for the church and its mission. The foundation was laid, and now those gifts have ceased. It would be too much of a digression to enter into proof of this assertion here. A good defense of the view that these gifts have ceased, called *cessationism*, may be found in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book IV, chapter 3, sections 1-8.

The particular gifts listed in vs. 6-8 are:

- (a) *Prophecy*: delivering or speaking the truth of God as given to the prophet by divine revelation.
- (b) *Service* (Greek: *diakonia*): meeting the material needs of the hungry, homeless, sick, afflicted, and destitute. Our word *deacon* comes from the Greek *diakonos*, a word related to *diakonia*. This gift may refer to ordained deacons, although not necessarily so, since the words *diakonia* and *diakonos* are general in meaning.
- (c) *Teaching*: expounding the Word of God, that is, speaking and applying the truth of God as received from the apostles and prophets (not as received by direct personal revelation.)
- (d) *Exhortation*: speaking to the heart to strengthen and move to action. The NIV renders it as *encouraging*.
- (e) *Contributing*: giving to the material needs of the poor.
- (f) *Leadership*: governing or ruling the church of God. This gift is exercised by elders and bishops, terms used interchangeably in the New Testament. The gift was also exercised by the apostles.
- (g) *Mercy*: giving direct help to those in need. This service is more personal than contributing. It need not involve giving material aid.

The gifts of service, teaching, exhortation, contributing, leadership, and mercy are not merely the natural abilities denoted by the same words. An unbeliever may be a good teacher in the secular world but would not be a good teacher in the church. Intellectual understanding and good technique are not

enough! Similarly, an unbelieving executive may possess excellent leadership skills for business, politics, or civil affairs, but he or she does not qualify for church service. Leadership in the church requires more than interpersonal skills, decisions-making ability, and the capacity to plan, organize, and delegate authority.

A believer gifted by God with teaching ability may be an excellent teacher in the public schools as well, and a Christian with leadership ability may well be successful in the business world. Indeed, a believer may use his or her gift in the world but fail to use it for the benefit of the church. Too many believers use their God-given talents only for themselves rather than for the good of the body as God intended. Hence, in vs. 6-8 Paul stresses that we are to use our gifts for each other's benefit and for the entire church.

Another danger exists with regard to the use of spiritual gifts: many Christians do not use their gifts at all, either for the church or for their personal benefit. Why not? Some Christians do not believe they have any spiritual gift. Yet Paul suggests here, and declares explicitly in 1 Corinthians 12:7, that every Christian has some manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Some have more than one gift. If you don't know your gift(s), you need to evaluate yourself objectively (v. 3) to determine what it or they may be, perhaps asking other believers for their insights.

A third danger exists with respect to spiritual gifts. It is all too easy to disdain the gifts of other Christians. We need to remind ourselves that God has so ordained that none of us has all the spiritual resources he or she needs. All of us need every one of our brothers and sisters and their gifts, just as they need us and our gifts (1 Corinthians 12:21-26). The body can grow into what God intends it to be only when each part functions properly.

#### ***4. Christian behavior.***

After exhorting us to use our spiritual gifts for each other's benefit, Paul admonishes us in vs. 9-21 to practice certain kinds of behavior towards each other and the world. These exhortations are for all believers; no one needs a special gift to make them part of his or her life. Verses 9-13 are directed mostly toward our relationships with other Christians; vs. 14-21 have in view our relationships with the world. The attitudes and practices commended here are covered in the answers to study questions 11 and 12 and will not be repeated here. Nevertheless, two points merit comment.

First, although we all are urged to contribute to the needs of our fellow Christians, only some have the special spiritual gift of contributing (compare v. 8 with v. 13). This suggests that the spiritual gift of contributing involves steady, continual giving. Does that fact imply that this gift is given primarily to the wealthy, those with means to give much as well as with insight to identify the truly needy and give to them without fuss or fanfare (saving the dignity of the recipients)? Perhaps, but wealthy or not, all of us are commanded to contribute to the needs of the saints as we are able.

Second, v. 21 is a summary of vs. 14-20. We are to overcome evil by our lives. By doing this we show that we are living sacrifices wholly given to God. The way we live in the midst of oppression and persecution is a critical test of just how dead to the world we are in practical terms. Do we revert to the world's way of defending self when attacked? Then we are not living according to the truth that we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

#### ***5. "You will heap burning coals on his head" (v. 20).***

Verse 20b seems jarringly out of place. Paul has been writing of the need to bless our persecutors, but here he quotes an Old Testament passage (Proverbs 25:21-22) that expresses a contrary wish. Does Paul mean that we can increase our enemies' eternal torment by doing them good when they do us ill (Psalm 140:10)? While this interpretation may be part of Paul's meaning, he must intend more. Considering the context, vs. 14-21, we can assume that Paul is referring in some way to the *blessing* our good behavior will bring to our enemies (Matthew 5:11-16). Some commentators suggest that

“burning coals on his head“ refers figuratively to a burning conscience. Paul’s point would be that our good behavior will make our enemies burn with shame at the thought of their evil behavior towards us (1 Peter 3:16).

**LESSON 16. Romans 13:1-14*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. How are we to *regard* the governing authorities? *vs. 2, 4*
  
2. How are we to *behave* toward the governing authorities? *vs. 1-7*
  
3. What is the proper, God-ordained role or function of government? *vs. 3-6*
  
4. What kind of debts are we permitted to incur? *vs. 8-12.*
  
5. What is the role of law for the Christian? *vs. 8-10*
  
6. What reason does Paul give for encouraging his readers to live God's way rather than the world's way? *vs. 11-14*
  
7. How can we live God's way? *v. 14*

## ***ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS***

### **1. How are we to *regard* the governing authorities? vs. 2, 4**

The Lord instituted governments among men. Whatever governments exist are established by him (but see study note 3). He has authorized them and charged them to execute wrath on evildoers and to do us good. God will hold the governing authorities accountable and will judge them according to their faithfulness in carrying out their duties. See 1 Kings 3:7-9, 8:25, and 11:9-11; Proverbs 16:10-15 and 20:26, 28.

### **2. How are we to *behave* toward the governing authorities? vs. 1-7**

We are to submit to them. We are to obey, not only because of the force they employ to exact obedience, but also because their power is legitimate. Hence, we are not to resist or rebel against their authority. We are to do right by obeying the laws and paying taxes; and we are to give them honor and respect. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul tells us to pray for our leaders, that they will carry out the duties God has charged them with, for in so doing they make it possible for us to live quiet, peaceable lives. See also 1 Samuel 24:1-6 and 26:7-11; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

### **3. What is the proper, God-ordained role or function of government? vs. 3-6**

(a) Government is obligated to punish those who do evil, using force when necessary. When the governing authorities do this they accomplish two things: (1) they act as God's agents in executing judgment on the wicked; (2) they make the world a safe place where we can go about the business of living for God.

(b) Government is God's agent for our good (v. 1). We may ask if this gives the state a mandate to undertake activities that 'promote the general welfare' (as written in the preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America) when those activities are not directly related to defense and public safety. What of activities such as education, the care of orphans, and public works? Paul does not address this question here. See study note 2 for further discussion.

### **4. What kind of debts are we permitted to incur? vs. 8-12**

We are to have no outstanding debts except the continuing debt to love one another, a debt that can never be paid in full. But what about a mortgage or a car payment? See study note 5.

### **5. What is the role of law for the Christian? vs. 8-10**

We are obligated to keep the law of God in that we are obligated to love our neighbor. The law shows us what loving behavior is. All the commandments Paul cites in vs. 8-10 illustrate love that will not do anything to harm our neighbor. See also Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:29-37; John 14:15 and 21 and 15:9-13; Galatians 5:14 and 6:2.

### **6. What reason does Paul give for encouraging his readers to live God's way rather than the world's way? vs. 11-14**

The return of Christ is getting closer every day. His return means our salvation (in the sense of salvation from the world) and glorification. See also 1 John 3:2-3

### **7. How can we live God's way? v. 14**

We are to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Greek: flesh. See Lesson 8, study 4.) To *clothe* ourselves with Christ is to yield ourselves to him, choosing to live holy lives pleasing to him in the power of the Holy Spirit. See Colossians 3:1-14, where Paul expands on the metaphor of *putting off* the sinful nature and *putting on* holy behavior.



## **STUDY NOTES**

### **1. The legitimacy of the governing authorities.**

Paul lived in an era when Roman emperors came to power by violent means. Augustus, who reigned when Jesus was born; Tiberius, who reigned when he was crucified; Caligula; Claudius, who probably was ruling when Paul wrote Romans; Nero, who, according to tradition, was ruling when Paul was executed in Rome - none of the first five emperors came to power by natural succession or free election by the Roman senate. All of them seized power by force and violence. Their reigns were marked by deceit, debauchery, violence, and murder at the highest political levels.

The history of Paul's own people also was characterized by political intrigue and violence. Many of the kings of Israel and Judah had come to power and maintained their rule by oppression and violence. (See 1 and 2 Kings for numerous examples.) And what are we to say in modern times in the light of the regimes of Hitler and the Soviets? In fact, most nations today are under governments originally established by military conquest, *coup d'état*, or revolution - including our own! Are all these governments established by God? Are they all legitimate?

Paul knew that God is sovereign over all. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. No one comes to power except by the will and working of God. God is not the author of the ungodly means men use to obtain power, but that they come to power is ordained by him. Hence, the Christian has no right to reject the authority of a given government merely because of how it came to power. The fact that it is in power is evidence that God ordained it.

### **2. The mandate of the governing authorities.**

God established the ruling authorities to carry out his purposes. He has charged and obligated them to execute his sentence of wrath on evildoers and has authorized them to use force for that purpose. They have the right to require our taxes, submission, and respect for the fulfillment of that end. Governments are ordained for our good (v. 4).

Whether or not governments acknowledge God's authority, they are responsible for carrying out the duties he has laid on them. When the authorities do not strive to prevent and punish evil or do not exercise their powers for our good, they sin against God and will suffer judgment for their delinquency.

It is easy to find fault with government. We daily observe its failure to prevent and punish evil. Government sins against God when it does not take steps to prevent and punish abortion, rape, murder, theft and extortion. It also sins against God when it does not protect the vulnerable against economic predation like loan sharking, fraud, price-fixing, and "sharp" business practices. And when it does not stem vice - prostitution, pornography, gambling, drugs - it sins against God.

While government sins when it does too little, can it sin by doing too much? Some Christians hold that government is to do good *only* in preventing and punishing wickedness. Other affirm that government has a mandate to undertake projects that promote the general welfare. The Bible gives us little basis for deciding which view is correct. Joseph advised Pharaoh to collect, store, and distribute food to the Egyptian people during the seven years of famine (Genesis 41:33-36). Solomon built store cities in various locations in his kingdom, possibly to meet the people's need in similar circumstances (1 Kings 9:19). Public water supplies existed in Jerusalem in the days of the kings of Judah (2 Kings 18:17). Paul himself traveled on publicly maintained Roman roads (Acts 23:13-16). These references are too inconclusive to direct us to any firm conclusion regarding the proper role of government in fostering public welfare.

And the point is moot. All modern governments undertake diverse activities, and society could not get along without some of them. Government builds bridges, operates schools, carries the mail, sponsors the arts, fights forest fires, and funds and administers entitlement programs such as welfare

and social security, maintains public health programs, purchases and maintains public parks and even parking lots. The list of activities carried out by government in the name of the public good is practically endless. And we are taxed for such activities. Probably no one believes government has a mandate to be involved in every enterprise for which we pay taxes. Faithful Christians and churches have differing opinions here, and this study guide will not express an opinion. As Paul says in 14:5 regarding another debatable issue, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

### ***3. Submission to the governing authorities - always?***

What is a Christian to do when government is not carrying out its divine mandate? What if it fails to protect its citizens from harm or does not punish wickedness or goes beyond the bounds God has set for its activities? What if it actually engages in unjust, violent, evil behavior?

Paul's teaching seems quite clear. We are to pay our taxes and whatever else we owe without resisting or rebelling. *Our* responsibility is to render to the government what it has the right to demand (Matthew 22:15-21); *government's* responsibility is to use its power and resources to carry out its divine mandate. When government does not obey God, it is the sin of the governing authorities and not our sin. We still are bound to render to government what it has a right to demand.

So, is civil disobedience *never* justified? Are there no circumstances under which we *must* refuse to obey government for conscience's sake? Indeed, are there governments so perverted that rebellion and revolution are called for?

Paul does not indicate any such circumstances in Romans. However, we know that we ought always to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:18-20). When the choice is between obeying the Lord of all and obeying human authority, we must obey God at all costs, even if it means disobeying the authorities. If we are compelled to participate directly and personally in evil we must refuse. In a democracy like ours we have the opportunity (if only indirectly) to change the policy of government and we should do what we can. However, the Bible gives no support to those who - whether on the left or on the right - would actively rebel against government as long as they are not compelled to participate personally in evil.

None of us is called by God to overthrow a government, as Jeroboam was (1 Kings 11:26-38) and Jehu was (2 King 9:1-37). Let him who so claims point to the prophet who anointed him! God always overthrows the wicked in his own time, but not by us.

### ***4. Should the state defend the faith?***

The Christian message had made little impact on the Roman world at the time Paul wrote Romans. Not till 250 years later, after continued growth and persecution, was the church taken under official protection of the Roman state by Emperor Constantine. He made Christianity the official faith of the empire and undertook to sponsor, protect, and defend the church. For the next 1500 years or so the Roman empire, its successor states, and the nations of the New World settled by European powers continued to view themselves as sponsors of the church and defenders of the faith. Only in the last 200 years or so have nations with a Christian heritage disestablished the church and given up defending the faith.

Some Christians today wish the state were still disposed to protect and defend the faith. Although our own government's stance towards the Christian faith and Christian churches is one of neutrality, the state is all too often hostile in its actions towards the cause of Christ. It may not be realistic to expect that we can turn our government around and make it avowedly Christian, but the question is not an idle one. Believers do get elected and appointed to decision-making positions. Should Christian office holders strive to implement biblical principles as public policy? Ought they to use their public powers to protect, encourage, and support the church?

Other democratic nations of the West have not separated church and state as completely as has the

United States. In some countries Christian schools receive financial support from the government. In others, Christian moral principles are part of the law of the land. On the negative side, we can think of countries where the government supports an established church, avowedly Christian, which actually obscures and opposes the pure gospel of Christ. We must ask: Should the government support the church and promote the Christian faith *in principle*?

The Reformers affirmed that the state, duty-bound by God to do good, must actively support true biblical religion. They maintained this position in spite of the fact they encountered first hand opposition of states defending a corrupt faith and opposing the gospel in the very name of Christ. The Reformers and their descendants for several generations were harassed, and martyred for the true faith of Christ. Yet they affirmed the principle that the state, as God's servant for our good, must support the church and the practice of biblical religion. Such was the position of Luther, Calvin, the English puritans, and the Scottish Presbyterians, and they implemented it wherever they could attain political power.

We must settle for less today, whatever we think the state should do, out of political realism if for no other reason. At the very least, the state ought to facilitate the practice of biblical religion. Any argument to the contrary must be founded on practical considerations - e.g., the fact that our society is pluralistic and hostile to the absolute moral standards of the law of God.

### ***5. Debt and the believer.***

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other" (v. 8). Some Christians take Paul's words as a command not to go into debt at all. But most of us are in debt. Our houses are mortgaged; we have car payments; we use bank cards and credit cards daily. Farmers and small businesses cannot operate without credit. Even most churches borrow money when they set out to build. If v. 8 is a command not to incur debt, most Christians in America are living in financial sin.

However, the NIV rendering of the Greek puts a different spin on v. 8. The NIV reads, "Let no debt remain outstanding . . ." This reading suggests that when we borrow money we should never fall behind in our payments. When we borrow money we should have a payment schedule and adhere to it faithfully.

The Bible says little about debt and does not give a basis for deciding which interpretation is correct. In any case, both are radical views that require us to break with the world's pattern of behavior. Here is one area where we need a transformed, renewed mind (12:2). The stronger interpretation to not even incur any debt is patently radical in American eyes. The interpretation suggested by the NIV, that we never fall behind in paying our debts, also requires breaking with much of our world, for a corollary of this practice is that we must exercise enough restraint and self control in buying that we avoid getting into debt over our heads.

Only by the power of God can we find the self control to resist the siren call to consume until we have consumed ourselves. We are submerged in a sea of advertising that urges us to buy whatever we want *now* - and to want what we did not want before. Lack of money is no problem! Easy credit! Nothing down! Buy now, pay later! Many Americans, Christians too, are unable in their own strength to control their lust to buy, just as we cannot control our lusts in eating, drinking, anger, and sex in our own strength. Self control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:7). Christians who cannot control the impulse to buy and borrow must come to realize that such excess is sin and that they must clothe themselves with Jesus Christ (v. 14). This means they must live by the power of the Spirit as they seek to bring this aspect of their life under the lordship of Christ. (See also Lesson 10, study note 3.)

### ***6. "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (v. 11).***

In v. 11 Paul refers to our salvation as a future hope. In 8:24 he describes it as a past reality. in 1

Corinthians 1:18 he writes of salvation as a present reality. Both the noun *salvation* and the verb *save* have past, present, and future aspects. They also denote both objective and subjective realities.

(a) *Salvation* often refers to the objective work of Christ for his people (Luke 1:60, 2:30, and 3:6; Ephesians 1:13). Used in this sense, the word denotes what Christ did for us rather than our experience of the benefits of his work. It has reference to the work done outside of us as the objective basis for the work done within us and to us when we believe.

(b) *Salvation* and *saved* frequently describe our personal justification and regeneration (Luke 19:19; Romans 1:16). In this sense salvation is a past event in the life of the believer, a one time occurrence initiating the good standing with God (5:1) and initiating new life (in Christ 6:11). In this sense this past event has a present aspect as well, one that we continue to enjoy as believers

(c) In at least one passage (Philippians 2:12) *salvation* refers to the continuous process of sanctification and deliverance from the power of sin in a believer's life.

(d) Here in v. 11 and elsewhere (Philippians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 7:10, 12:10, and 19:1) *salvation* is a future, *eschatological* reality. The word *eschatological* comes from a Greek word meaning *last*, and refers to the events of the last days when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven. In this future sense, "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (v. 11).

It is reassuring that our complete salvation - past, present, eternal - was secured by Christ our Savior.

**LESSON 17. Romans 14:1-23*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What does *weak in faith* mean? *vs. 1-2, 14, 23*
2. What matters were disputed in the Roman church? *vs. 2, 5, 14-17*
3. In general, how are we to behave towards those weak in faith? *vs. 1, 3, 10, 13-15, 19-21*
4. What is Paul's admonition to the restrictive Christian? *vs. 3, 13, 23*
5. What is Paul's command to all Christians, restrictive and permissive? *vs. 1, 4-13, 18-19*
6. Why is it wrong to judge a brother's convictions about the kinds of issues under consideration here? *vs. 8-13a*
7. What constraints limit a Christian's liberty of conduct? See also 13:8-14
8. Is it wrong to continue in certain behavior that I know is acceptable to God, even good in itself, if a less mature, weaker brother considers it to be sinful? *vs. 19-21*
9. Can you think of contemporary issues in the church where this chapter is especially pertinent?

**ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS****1. What does *weak in faith* mean? vs. 1-2, 14, 23**

The faith referred to here is not trust in Christ or belief in the cardinal doctrines of the Bible. It is belief that Christ has freed us from the ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses and from human regulations (see also 1 Corinthians 8:7; Galatians 5:13-15; Colossians 2:16-17 and 20-22). To be weak in faith is to have a weak conscience, that is, a conscience that condemns one for doing something not actually forbidden by God's law or for failing to do something not actually commanded by the moral law.

**2. What matters were disputed in the Roman church? vs. 2, 5, 14-17**

- (a) Are some foods morally unclean? May one eat meat as well as vegetables (vs. 2, 24)?
- (b) Should one observe certain days as holy days or are all days alike (v. 5; also Galatians 4:10)?
- (c) Is it permissible to drink wine (v. 21)?

**3. In general, how are we to behave towards those weak in faith? vs. 1, 3, 10, 13-15, 19-21**

- (a) We should accept the brother or sister with scruples without passing judgment or arguing about disputed matters that don't involve essential Christian doctrine (vs. 1, 10).
- (b) We ought not to despise the weaker brother or sister (vs. 3, 10).
- (c) We should resolve not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in their way, that is, we should not let our actions destroy the weaker brother or sister (vs. 13-15).

**4. What is Paul's admonition to the restrictive Christian? vs. 3, 13, 23**

- (a) He or she is not to judge or condemn the more permissive Christian.
- (b) He or she must not do anything the conscience does not permit. What is not of faith is sin. (v. 23).

**5. What is Paul's command to all Christians, restrictive and permissive? vs. 1, 4-13, 18-19**

- (a) We are to welcome one another in spite of differences over the sorts of things described in this chapter.
- (b) We are not to pass judgment on one another (vs. 4, 10, 13).
- (c) We are to live for the Lord.. Whatever we do or refrain from doing is to be for God (vs. 6-9).
- (d) We are to pursue righteousness and peace and joy in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- (e) We are to do what we can to promote peace and mutual upbuilding (v. 19).

**6. Why is it wrong to judge a brother's convictions about the kinds of issues under consideration here? vs. 8-13a**

Our unspiritual tendency is to judge our brother rather than his convictions. Our brother is accountable to God, not to us. Every Christian is to live unto the Lord and not unto men, not even to fellow Christians. God will judge our brother - and us as well.

**7. What constraints limit a Christian's liberty of conduct? See also 13:8-14**

We are to act out of love for our brothers and sisters. We ought to have more concern for their good than for our own liberty and pleasure.

**8. Is it wrong continue in certain behavior that I know is acceptable to God, even good in itself, if a less mature, weaker brother considers it to be sinful? vs. 19-21**

- (a) Continuing in such practices can lead to divisions in the church and destroy peace among believers.

(b) Our conduct can destroy the weaker brother or sister by encouraging him or her to engage in behavior the conscience does not really approve. What the conscience does not allow is sin (v. 23), and to persist in sin against one's conscience leads to shipwreck of one's faith (1 Timothy 1:29).

**9. Can you think of contemporary issues in the church where this chapter is especially pertinent?**

The use of alcohol and vegetarianism or veganism, mentioned here, are still disputed issues in various quarters of the church. Some would say that honoring the Lord's Day is also a disputable matter; however, while it may be disputed, it ought not to be - see study note 4. Examples of other disputed matters are the issue of paying taxes that support state-financed abortions or military expenditures that the taxpayer considers unjust; membership in certain secret societies or labor unions; the use of tobacco; social dancing; participating in Halloween activities. Other disputed practices could be cited.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### ***1. Disagreement and Christian love.***

Born-again Christians often disagree with each other on matters of faith and life, not on the essentials of the faith, but on issues all agree to be secondary. As one body in Christ, we ought to treat one another with love and respect even when we disagree (12:3-13, 13:8-10). Sadly, our disputes sometimes strain unity and lead to loveless acts. Disputes over secondary matters can produce bad feelings. At times we condemn some believers and look down on others as immature and lacking spiritual knowledge on account of their differing views and practices. We staunchly defend our beliefs on secondary issues as “matters of principle,” heedless of the effects of our behavior on the spiritual well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Possibly the church in Rome experienced such internal disputes; at least, Paul was concerned it might. The apostle takes up the question of disagreements over secondary matters in this chapter. His purpose is not to render a definitive ruling on each dispute (although he does indicate clearly how things stand with respect to unclean foods). Rather his purpose is to call his readers to live so as to strengthen each other and the church. It is far more important to work for the peace, unity, and edification of God’s people than to maintain our own opinions and rights against all comers no matter what the cost. As we study chapter 14, let us determine both to learn and to put into practice the lesson Paul teaches here.

### ***2. Disputable matters.***

We need to be able know which beliefs are essential truths of the faith, which are secondary truths, and which are matters of indifference. Essential truths are not disputable, though they may be disputed. We *must* contend for them whenever they are challenged or denied. Secondary truths must never be denied, but we need not always contend for them. Matters of indifference ought not to be disputed unless someone makes it a matter of obedience or belief for all, or worse, an essential of the faith; then we must refute such false teaching.

*Essential truths* are truths one must believe to be saved or, at least, a saved person must not deny them. Understandably, a young Christian may be ignorant of some essential doctrines. Some essential truths are the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, the vicarious atonement, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. We must stand firm for the essential truths of the faith even though division and controversy result. The Lord’s people will recognize and cling to essential truth when it is disputed and challenged (John 10:1-5, 14-16, and 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 11:18-19 and 15:1-4; 1 John 2:18-19).

*Secondary truths* are matters revealed in Scripture or deduced with certainty from Scripture that are not essentials of the gospel faith. The truth of infant baptism is an example of a secondary truth. It can be deduced from Scripture (see Lesson 6, study note 2), but belief in infant baptism is not essential for salvation. Other secondary truths include the imputation of Adam’s sin (see Lesson 7, study note 4) and the identity of Israel and the church (see Lesson 14, study note 4).

All secondary truths are not of equal importance and do not have equal implications for our obedience. We must contend for a secondary truth whenever personal obedience demands it. For example, since baptizing our children is a matter of obedience to God, we dare not forego baptizing our children in the interest of peace and unity, but since it is not an essential of the faith we may not insist that believers baptize their children as a condition of church membership. Other secondary truths do not entail obedience to God, and we need not always contend publicly for such truths. For example, in spite of what some Roman believers thought, Christians may eat meat (see study note 3). Yet Scripture does not require us to eat meat. The truth that all foods are clean (Mark 7:19) does not entail obedience or disobedience. We ought to believe this principle, for it is scriptural, but we do not



need to contend openly for it unless someone begins to teach that God requires abstinence from meat.

*Matters of indifference* ( Greek: *adiaphora*, meaning *not to be preferred*, that is, practices where it doesn't matter what position one takes.) These are practices where, for lack of biblical directives, one cannot establish a general rule. In such cases the believer has freedom to follow his or her individual conscience. May a Christian use tobacco? May we celebrate Christmas? Is it all right to drink alcohol in moderation? Such questions are considered *adiaphora* by some Christians while others think they can deduce a definite affirmative or negative answer from Scripture.

It is precisely the kind of issue that is a matter of indifference to one and a matter of principle to another that Paul deals with in chapter 14.

### **3. *Why vegetarianism was an issue.***

One issue disputed in the church at Rome was the eating of meat. Some believed they could eat all foods, including meat, while others ate only vegetables and abstained from meat as a matter of principle. Since Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), and Paul clearly states that those who would only eat vegetables were weak in faith, what motivated this vegetarianism? Why did the vegetarians think eating meat was sinful?

A likely reason for their scruples is suggested in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-33. Much of the meat sold in the cities of the Roman Empire, like Corinth and Rome, came from pagan temples. A worshiper would bring an animal to be sacrificed to a pagan god. Part of the animal's flesh would be offered to the god on the altar and part would be consumed by the worshiper in a ritual meal on temple grounds. The priests would sell the remainder of the meat in the public market (the "shambles" in the KJV) to provide income for the temple. Some recent converts in Corinth, and presumably in Rome, had a strong sense of the religious significance of eating temple meat, knowing that for pagans it amounted to participating in a rite expressing union with a pagan god. They could not be sure that eating any meat sold in public had not been consecrated to an idol. The safe thing was to abstain from all meat.

Paul knew the pagan gods were no gods at all, but he also knew that some Christians in the Greco-Roman world had this hang-up; their faith was weak. His admonition to the stronger brother or sister in Rome was essentially the same as his admonition to the Corinthians. Compare Romans 14:15-16 and 20:23 with 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 and 10:22-23.

Among twenty-first century Christians only Seventh-Day Adventists are vegetarians as a group (though not all of them are). They base their abstinence on the teaching of Ellen G. White, one of their founders, whom they consider to have been a prophetess. Are we to refrain from disputing with them on the issue of eating meat when the issue is raised? No, we should argue from Scripture if the matter comes up for discussion, for their belief rests on the false and dangerous doctrine that Mrs. White was inspired by God. The real issue with Seventh-Day Adventists is not vegetarianism, but whether God has revealed himself to one of their founders in the same way he revealed himself in biblical times. Our Lord was not silent when the traditions of men were opposed to the Word of God (Mark 7:1-8), and we dare not be silent either when that is the real issue. But let all our debates with Seventh-Day Adventists be carried out in patience, gentleness, and love (2 Timothy 2:23-26). They are members of a genuine Christian church in spite of this and other errors.

### **4. *Is the weekly sabbath for the weak?***

Verses 5-6 indicate that a disagreement arose in the Roman church over the keeping of holy days. Some believed one day more sacred than the rest while others treated all days alike. What kind of days were under consideration? Were they the Jewish feasts? Was the weekly sabbath a matter of controversy? We cannot be absolutely certain what kinds of days were disputed in Rome, for vs. 5-6

are too brief. But disputes over observing special days occurred in other churches Paul wrote to, namely those in Galatia and Colossae. These disputes suggest some kinds of disagreement that may have troubled the church in Rome.

The Galatian churches seem to have begun observing the Jewish holy days after Paul left them (Galatians 4:9-11). Believers in Colossae were under pressure to do the same (Colossians 2:16-17). Paul told both the Galatians and Colossians that they were under no obligation to keep the Jewish holy days; indeed, he strongly suggests that they not keep them. It's likely that the controversy in Rome also was over the observance of the Jewish holy days. However, Paul is neutral with regard to the disagreement in Rome. If the issue in Rome was the same as that in Galatia and Colossae, why was his response different in Rome?

Perhaps the difference was that the Romans who celebrated the Jewish holy days didn't seek to impose them as an obligation for the whole Roman church. It may be that observing the Jewish holy days was a matter of indifference in Rome, neither commended nor forbidden - one of the *adiaphora*. - and all would have known it. On the other hand, some in Galatia and Colossae had elevated a matter of indifference to a matter of obedience for all Christians. In such a case Paul had to contend for the truth of the gospel. Christ had fulfilled the Law, and its ceremonies and holy days that were but shadows of Christ had been rendered obsolete (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

So much for the Jewish holy days and their rites. But does the weekly sabbath fall into the same category as the Jewish holy days? Is it a matter of indifference? This is a question of importance for us today. Should we oppose those who elevate the sabbath to a matter of obedience for all Christians?

Far from it! The contrary is the case. We must maintain that the sabbath commandment has abiding validity, it is in a different category than the yearly feasts or monthly New Moon observance. The institution of the weekly sabbath antedated the giving of the Law to Israel on Sinai; like marriage, it is a creation ordinance (Genesis 2:2-3). Mark records that Jesus abolished the Jewish dietary restrictions that had been given to Israel only, but he declared that the sabbath was made for *man* - not for Israel alone, but for generic man, the whole human race (Mark 2:27). Finally, prophecies of Christ's future reign refer to the perpetuity of the sabbath (Isaiah 66:22-23; Ezekiel 44:24). On the basis of such scriptural evidence, we conclude that the weekly Jewish sabbath is not in view in Romans 14.

But Paul says in Colossians 2:16, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath." Isn't he referring to the weekly sabbath? Indeed he is. While the word *sabbath* sometimes serves as a generic term for special, non-weekly sabbaths (e.g., Leviticus 16:31), in Colossians 2:16 Paul refers to the *yearly* feasts, the *monthly* New Moon celebrations, and the *weekly* sabbath days. However, it seems that the issue in Colossae (and possibly in Rome) was not whether a weekly sabbath day should be kept, but whether it was to be the Jewish sabbath on Saturday or the Lord's Day on Sunday.

The church of Christ began early to worship on the first day of the week, Sunday. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). No doubt many Jewish Christians continued to observe the traditional Saturday sabbath as well as the Sunday Lord's Day. Paul states plainly in Romans that there was nothing wrong with Saturday worship, but it was not mandatory for Jewish Christians or for those of Gentile background. Paul tells the Colossians that they should let no one take them to task for not celebrating the Jewish holy days, including the Saturday sabbath; he is not saying they have no obligation to keep one day in the week holy to the Lord. On that issue Paul has nothing to say in Romans.

If Paul were writing to the American church today he most certainly would take up the *necessity* of observing the Sunday Lord's Day. The Lord's Day means almost nothing to modern unbelievers and not much more to many Christians today. Some believers work as willingly on the Lord's Day as on any other day; others spend most of the Lord's Day on recreation and sports. Some feel it would be legalistic or puritanical to observe the sabbath. We are ignorant - perhaps willfully so - of the New Testament authority for the continued validity of a weekly day devoted to rest, worship. and the

contemplation of God's finished work of creation and redemption. We are God's redeemed people, a new creation (2 Corinthians 4:6 and 5:17; Galatians 6:15-16). Let us not go so far as to make observance of the Lord's Day an essential of the faith, but let us not make it a matter of indifference!

### ***5. Love limits liberty.***

Most of Paul's remarks in chapter 14 are addressed to the man strong in faith. He knows that Christ has set him free from the Jewish ceremonial law. He knows that food offered to an idol is clean, no matter what the heathen worshiper intended: the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26). He knows that wine is not evil in itself, though the abuse of alcohol is terrible. He knows that he is free to celebrate the weekly sabbath on the Sunday, the Lord's Day; if he is a Jewish Christian he is also free to continue to celebrate the Jewish holy days, aware now of how the truths they foreshadow have been fulfilled in Christ.

We may wonder why Paul does not seek to convince the weaker brother of his liberty in Christ. Why doesn't he take the opportunity to correct the imperfect view of the less mature Christian? Why does he direct most of chapter 14 to the brother who rejoices in his liberty in Christ, the man strong in faith?

Paul's chief concern in writing is the spiritual well-being of the Christians in Rome (1:5-6, 11-12). The greatest danger to their spiritual well being was not the immaturity of young Christians. Paul knew that in time God would bring them to a fuller understanding of the gospel and of Christian freedom (Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:6, 9-11; Colossians 1:9-10). The great danger, rather, was that those weak in faith might sin against their conscience and make shipwreck of their faith before they grew into a mature understanding of Christian liberty (1 Timothy 1:19). Sin, not ignorance or immaturity, was the danger. It is the greatest danger we face today. Paul was aware that the strong in faith could increase the danger of sin for others, and for this reason he directs chapter 14 primarily to those strong in faith.

How can the strong in faith harm the weak? They can harm them by the open practice of conduct the weaker brother or sister considers sinful. The weak Christian may be halfway convinced by the stronger Christian's example, but to be halfway convinced is still to doubt, and to engage in behavior about which one has doubts is sin (v. 23). Without denying that God preserves his elect and keeps them from falling entirely away from Christ, we still must acknowledge that we can gravely wound a brother or sister and damage the church by our example. The danger is not that a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation. Paul gave us ample assurance in chapters 5 and 8 that those whom God foreknew, predestined, called, and justified in love while they were his enemies will be preserved and glorified with Christ now that they are his friends (5:5-10, 8:28-29). It is rather that the weaker Christian's walk with God and growth in Christ will be destroyed. The doubt and sense of guilt for transgressing his own conscience will wreak unhappiness and anguish of spirit.

For the stronger Christian the demands of love are clear. He or she must refrain from behavior that could damage the faith of the less mature brother and lead him to sin against his own conscience. If eating meat is the problem, the stronger Christian should not eat meat in the presence of the weaker brother or sister. Twenty-first century Christians will be able to think of contemporary issues involving the same principle - see the answer to study question 9.

What about my Christian liberty? Am I to restrict my freedom in Christ because of the mistaken views of a younger Christian? *Absolutely!* - unless the weaker brother seeks to impose his imperfect understanding on the whole church. I can refrain from open practice of what is good for me out of love for my brother or sister with joy and confidence. I can be confident that in time God will lead my fellow believer to a more mature understanding of the truth. When the church functions as it ought, when unity, peace, and love prevail among the members of the body, each member will grow in knowledge and faith through the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is God's pattern for the

church (12:13; 1 Corinthians 12:22-26; Ephesians 4:1-16). But when I contribute to my brother's fall into sin by stubbornly insisting on my rights, then both his growth and mine come to a halt. Indeed, I find myself to be a sinner by spurning the law of love (13:8-10).

**LESSON 18. Romans 15:1-33*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. What principles should govern our behavior toward our fellow believers? *vs. 1-2, 5, 7-8*
  
2. How did Jesus illustrate and exemplify these principles? *vs. 7-8; see also Matthew 12:20*
  
3. Paul quotes Psalm 69:7-9 in v. 3. What is the significance of those verses for his argument?
  
4. What enables us to glorify God together? *vs. 5-6*
  
5. Why should we accept each other? *v. 7*
  
6. What is Paul's purpose in quoting the Old Testament in vs. 9-13? What is the function of those quotations in his argument?
  
7. Paul has a high view of the knowledge and maturity of the Christians in Rome. Why then does he write such a long doctrinal letter to them? *vs. 14-15; also 1:11-12, 16:17-19*
  
8. What were Paul's goals as a minister of Christ? *vs. 16, 19-20*
  
9. What were Paul's means in proclaiming the gospel? *vs. 18-19; see also 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2:1-5*
  
10. How much of the task God had given him had Paul completed at the time he wrote Romans? *vs. 22-24*

11. What work remained for Paul to accomplish? *vs. 24-28*

12. How could the Christians in Rome be Paul's co-workers? *vs. 24-33*

**LESSON 18. Romans 15:1-33****ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS****1. What principles should govern our behavior toward our fellow believers? vs. 1-2, 5, 7-8**

- (a) We ought to bear with their failings and weaknesses and not live to please only ourselves.
- (b) We should please our neighbor in what we do if that will promote his good and edification.
- (c) We must try to live in harmony with each other.
- (d) We must accept each other as we now are.
- (e) We ought to follow the Lord's example and see ourselves as servants of our fellow Christians.

**2. How did Jesus illustrate and exemplify these principles? vs. 7-8; see also Matthew 12:20**

- (a) Christ did not live for himself but for God.
- (b) He accepted insults that were directed toward God (John 15:18-21).
- (c) He welcomed us and accepted us into God's people even though we were (and still are) sinners.
- (d) He became a servant to God's people.

**3. Paul quotes Psalm 69:7-9 in v. 3. What is the significance of those verses for his argument?**

Paul states that this Scripture was given so that we might receive encouragement and be made patient, so that we might live in hope. We can expect that living as servants of our neighbor and of God will lead to insult and reproach. But God glorified his Son after his obedience and suffering, and he will glorify us also (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 1 Peter 5:10).

**4. What enables us to glorify God together? vs. 5-6**

Unity in following Christ.

**5. Why should we accept each other? v. 7**

Christ accepted every one of us.

**6. What is Paul's purpose in quoting the Old Testament in vs. 9-13? What is the function of those quotations in his argument?**

- (a) Paul wants to reinforce the truth just stated (v. 7), that Christ welcomed the "weaker," i.e., the Gentile, into God's people. We should serve God as Christ did by accepting the weaker brother into our fellowship without looking down on him or wrangling with him (vs. 1-3).
- (b) He wants to encourage the Gentile Christians in Rome and to build up their confidence and hope.
- (c) He wants Gentile believers to praise God for his mercy to them in Christ.
- (d) He wishes to introduce the concluding section of the letter. Paul's conclusion deals with his ministry to the Gentiles.

**7. Paul has a high view of the knowledge and maturity of the Christians in Rome. Why then does he write such a long doctrinal letter to them? vs. 14-15; also 1:11-12, 16:17-19**

- (a) Paul wants to remind his readers of some particular truths (vs. 14-15).
- (b) He has an obligation to the Romans as well as to the rest of the Gentiles. Paul is obligated to make sure that the church in Rome receives the full counsel of God even though they have heard the gospel from other sources.

**8. What were Paul's goals as a minister of Christ? vs. 16, 19-20**

Paul sought to proclaim the gospel particularly where it had not been preached before. He also

endeavored to make his converts “an offering of the Gentiles . . . acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (v.16) - in other words, mature Christians.

**9. What were Paul’s means in proclaiming the gospel? vs. 18-19; see also 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2:1-5**

Paul preached the gospel. In the course of his preaching he also performed signs and miracles that confirmed the message (Acts 13:9-12, 14:8-10, 17:25-29, 19:6, 20:9-12, and 28:1-6). The preaching, signs, and miracles were all done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**10. How much of the task God had given him had Paul completed at the time he wrote Romans? vs. 22-24**

Paul had fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum (the coastal region of modern Croatia, across the Adriatic Sea from Italy). There was no more work for an apostle in those regions (see study note 3).

**11. What work remained for Paul to accomplish? vs. 24-28**

He wanted to bring the gospel to Spain, the farthest reach of the empire in his day. But first he had to carry a donation from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. He intended then to visit Rome en route to Spain.

**12. How could the Christians in Rome be Paul’s co-workers? vs. 24-33**

(a) Paul hoped they would be able to assist him on his journey to Spain. Whether he had financial help in mind as well as hospitality is unclear.

(b) He wanted them to join him in prayer for his journey to Jerusalem.



## **STUDY NOTES**

### ***1. Christ our example.***

Verses 1-7 of chapter 15 continue the thought of chapter 14. In chapter 14 Paul exhorts us to accept each other and to defer to our brother's scruples out of love. He reinforces this exhortation in chapter 15 by appealing to the example of Christ. We should please our neighbor rather than ourselves because Christ lived to please the Father rather than himself (Luke 22:12; John 5:30 and 6:38). Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples (John 17:11, 22-23); we should welcome all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus, for he welcomed all of us into his fellowship. Christ became a servant to his Jewish kinsmen; we should serve our brothers also. If love for our fellow Christians is not sufficient motivation to accept them and even to defer to their scruples on nonessential matters, the desire to follow our Savior's example certainly should be cause enough.

### ***2. God's acceptance of the Gentiles.***

The greatest example of welcoming the unwelcome is Christ's acceptance of the Gentiles into his people. The earliest Christians, who were all Jews, found this surprising at first (Acts 11:6 and 15:14). Paul has dealt with the universal character of sin and salvation through faith throughout Romans. He reintroduces the theme of God's gracious reception of the Gentiles in vs. 7-13 for two reasons.

(a) Paul shows that Christ secured the eternal salvation of the Gentiles by doing God's will rather than by pleasing himself. We are to follow our Savior's example. We help the weaker brother grow spiritually by having more regard for his good than for our own rights and pleasures. We also help the church grow by accepting the weaker brother or sister, just as God's ingathering of the Gentiles brings the worldwide church nearer to its intended fullness. God has room in his church for "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" (Luke 14:21). If we are to "compel people to come in" (Luke 14:23), we certainly must make them feel welcome once they have entered. After all, most of us were "Gentile sinners" (Galatians 2:15), and although "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22), Christ welcomed us.

(b) Paul reintroduces the theme of the salvation of the Gentiles because he intends to conclude his letter with a review of his past ministry and a preview of what he hopes to accomplish in the future.

### ***3. Paul's ministry, past and future.***

Paul was proud of what he had accomplished for Christ. He claims to have fully proclaimed the gospel eastward from Jerusalem all the way up to the Adriatic coast opposite Italy. How could he make such a claim? The Book of Acts describes his missionary journeys. By tracing them on a map one can determine that they hardly cover the region "from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum" (v. 19). Acts gives no account of Paul ever having visited Illyricum; most likely he never got closer to Illyricum than Macedonia and Achaia, that is, modern Greece.

However, Paul had planted churches in key provincial and regional centers: Paphos in Cyprus; Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in Galatia; Antioch in Pisidia; Perga in Pamphylia; various unnamed locations in Syria and Cilicia; Troas in Mysia; Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica in Macedonia; Athens and Corinth in Achaia; Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. These churches were self-governing, with their own elders (also called bishops) to govern them; they had their own pastors, teachers, evangelists, and others gifted by the Holy Spirit for the edification and growth of their churches and for the spread of the gospel (see Lesson 15, study note 3). Paul had founded churches that would reach out into their surrounding regions and provinces and proclaim Christ in the neighboring cities, town, and villages. He was confident that even Illyricum would be penetrated by evangelists (and ordinary Christians as well) from Macedonia and Achaia, perhaps even from Italy, where others had carried the gospel. History proved Paul right. The whole eastern Mediterranean world was saturated

with the gospel message and populated with churches at an early date. There was no more work remaining for him in those parts.

But Spain! Spain was unevangelized territory unlikely to be reached by evangelists from existing churches for decades. That was where Paul wanted to go next.

Paul's heart is perhaps best revealed by contrast with the prophet Jonah. The land Paul knew as Spain was the Tarshish of Jonah's day. Jonah sought to *avoid* God's call to take his Word to the heathen of Nineveh by taking a ship to Tarshish. He thought of Tarshish as the end of the world, a country God did not even notice, a backwater where he could escape from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:1-3). Unlike the prophet Jonah, Paul burned to proclaim the gospel to the heathen. He knew God was the God of Spain and that he had a people of his own in Spain, elect, prepared to respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ

Paul expected the church at Rome to help him on his way to Spain with hospitality and perhaps with money or traveling companions. He assumed that believers in Rome would want to share in the work of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. May we seek to share in the evangelization of the world in our day, by sending men and women, by supplying funds, and by praying for our missionaries.

**LESSON 19. Romans 16:1-27*****STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Who was Phoebe, and what was her relationship to Paul and to the church in Rome? *vs. 1-2.*
  
2. Who were Priscilla and Aquila? *vs. 3-5; see also Acts 18:1-4*
  
3. Was Paul personally acquainted with all those he greets in vs. 3-15?
  
4. What is Paul's warning to the church at Rome? *vs. 17-20*
  
5. Why do some persons create division in the church and teach false doctrine? *v. 18; see also 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and Titus 1:10-11*
  
6. How can the church ward off division and error? *vs. 17-20, 26*
  
7. In vs. 25-26 Paul writes of "the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith."
  - a. What is "the mystery that was kept secret for long ages"? *See Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:25-27.*
  
  - b. How has the mystery "been made known to all nations"?

## **ANSWERS TO THE STUDY QUESTIONS**

### **1. Who was Phoebe, and what was her relationship to Paul and to the church in Rome? vs. 1-2**

Phoebe was a servant, or possibly a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, and apparently Phoebe carried Paul's letter to Rome.

### **2. Who were Priscilla and Aquila? vs. 3-5; see also Acts 18:1-4**

Priscilla and Aquila were a Jewish couple who practiced tent making or leather working, the same trade as Paul. They had lived in Corinth for a time after the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome, and Paul lived and worked with them while they were there. A church had met in their house in Corinth, and a church was meeting in their house in Rome at the time Paul wrote the letter (apparently they had been allowed to return to Rome.)

### **3. Was Paul personally acquainted with all those he greets in vs. 3-15?**

He definitely knew Epenetus, Andronicus, Junia, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Herodian, Persis, and Rufus. It's possible he knew all those he addressed by name.

### **4. What is Paul's warning to the church at Rome? vs. 17-20**

The believers there are to be on the watch for men who would cause divisions and teach false doctrine.

### **5. Why do some persons create division in the church and teach false doctrine? v. 18; see also 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and Titus 1:10-11**

Some do these things because they hope for worldly rewards, such as money, adulation and praise, and power.

### **6. How can the church ward off division and error? vs. 17-20, 26**

- (a) The church must watch out for those who would divide the fellowship or teach a different gospel.
- (b) The church must be grounded in the essentials of the gospel.

### **7. In vs. 25-26 Paul writes of "the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith."**

#### **a. What is "the mystery that was kept secret for long ages"? See Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:25-27.**

The mystery is that God intends to save men and women out of all nations through faith in Christ. Although prior to the incarnation of the Son of God a few individuals from heathen nations knew the true God (Melchizedek, Ruth, and Naaman come to mind), salvation through faith in the Messiah was virtually unknown to the Gentiles "for long ages." The truth that God would accept Gentiles on a completely equal footing with Jews, the truth that all are saved through faith in Christ without the works of the Law of Moses - these truths were largely if not entirely hidden from Jews and Gentiles alike.

#### **b. How has the mystery "been made known to all nations"?**

The Lord Jesus sent his apostles into all the world to proclaim that the salvation promised by the prophets to Israel was for all nations, that all people could be saved through faith in him.

## STUDY NOTES

### 1. Phoebe: servant or deaconess?

Phoebe is described in v. 16 as a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea. The Greek word *diakonos* means *servant*, or more precisely, one who *ministers* or *waits upon* the master to do his bidding. In the New Testament *diakonos* is also used in a technical sense to refer to a *deacon*. The apostles ordained the first deacons and charged them with meeting the material needs of the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). (Although the word *diakonos* is not used in Acts 6:1-6, the related words *diakonia*, translated *distribution* and *ministry*, and *diakonein*, translated *serve* or *wait on*, are found in 6:1, 2, 4.) The office of deacon spread quickly to the churches in other localities. By the time Paul was writing his letters, local churches were selecting their own elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The question arises, was Phoebe an ordained deaconess or was she an unordained servant of the church?

Paul lists the qualities of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. He declares that a deacon must be a man worthy of respect (3:8) with but one wife (3:2) who also must be worthy of respect. Based on this passage of Scripture, evangelical churches have held that deacons must be men.

Some evangelical writers and some evangelical churches of the present day contest the proposition that a woman cannot occupy the office of deacon. They cite Romans 16:1 as evidence women occupied the office in the early church. However, their argument is weak. If women were eligible for ordination to the office of deacon, Paul would certainly have made this clear in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The passage in 1 Timothy is a *didactic* portion of Scripture, i.e., a passage that presents systematic teaching. Romans 16:1, on the other hand, is an *incidental* passage; it does not present teaching on the subject of deacons. Paul's intention in Romans 16:1 is to commend Phoebe to the care of the church in Rome. He mentions that she is a *diakonos* to show why she is worthy of care. It is a cardinal rule of sound *hermeneutics* (the science of interpretation) that didactic passages serve to illuminate the meaning of incidental references and not vice versa. We must conclude that Phoebe was not a deaconess, but an unordained servant of the church in Cenchrea.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that Paul's purpose in 16:1-2 is to commend Phoebe for her faithful service and to call on the Christians in Rome to honor and assist her. Although women are not eligible for the *offices* of elder and deacon, both men and women receive the gift of *service* - *diakonia* in its general sense - for the benefit of the whole church (12:7). All who have the gift of service are to exercise that gift, and all of God's servants are to be honored for their faithfulness.

The experience of countless churches shows that many women are of greater service in the church than some men who occupy the office! Indeed, the women and not the men are the backbone of some churches. The women in such churches are to be highly honored for their faithfulness - but what about the men who are shirking their God-given responsibilities? Male or female, church officer or not, each of us is to be a servant of the church as Phoebe was. May we receive a commendation from the Lord for our faithfulness like the one Paul accords Phoebe for hers!

### 2. Paul's co-workers.

In addition to Phoebe, Paul commends Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila, Mary, Urbanus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis for their work for the Lord. Priscilla, Aquila, and Urbanus had worked with Paul personally; perhaps some of the others also had been with him on his travels. A careful reading of Acts reveals that Paul was not a solitary missionary lacking companions or support from other believers. On the contrary, he always had traveling companions to share the gospel work. He accepted lodging and food in towns where he labored, and he may have received some financial backing from the church in Antioch, which sent him out at first (Acts 13:1-31). Paul was able to refuse material help from the Corinthian church while he lived and worked there only because Christians elsewhere in Macedonia and Achaia supplemented the income he derived from his trade (1 Corinthians 9:12-15; 2

Corinthians 11:7-9).

Our missionaries and full-time Christian workers think of us as their co-workers. Without our prayers, encouragement, financial support, and hospitality they would be far less free and able to carry out their ministry. For us, being co-workers with those preaching, teaching, evangelizing, and healing on a full-time basis, whether at home or abroad, is an essential part of becoming living sacrifices for Christ (12:1-2). To live for God requires us to view ourselves as part of a single body with different parts that need each other. We see again that all of Romans from chapter 13 on is based on the principles laid down in chapter 12.

### ***3. Doctrine and divisions.***

What are the sources of conflict and division in the church? Do you realize that true doctrine is an occasion for division? The personal motivation of someone who creates strife may be satisfaction of the desires of the old nature, like love of money or pride, but the issue at stake is often the emergence of teaching contrary to sound doctrine (v. 17). The churches that care most about maintaining pure doctrine are those that experience the most strife and division! Believers who maintain that what a church teaches and believes is important, whether they be a majority or minority in the church, will not allow false doctrine to spread silently. On the other hand, denominations are seldom troubled by division if few care much about doctrine; they are also seldom blessed with sound teaching. False doctrine will arise. The question is, What will be the reaction of the church?

One of two things will happen where a church contains some who believe doctrine is important enough to fight for. Those in error will be forced to leave if those who adhere to the truth constitute a majority; or those who hold to true doctrine may be forced out if they are a minority.

There is always sin on someone's part when divisions occur, but divisions on doctrinal matters also reveal spiritual health (1 Corinthians 11:19; 1 John 2:18-20). It is healthy when some people care enough for the truth to fight for it.

Paul writes to remind the Roman church of the major doctrines of the faith so that they will be able to recognize heresy when it appears. He urges them to isolate and shun false teachers, nipping the growth of false doctrine in the bud (vs. 17, 20). For centuries the church at Rome did remain pure in doctrine in spite of persecution from without and heresies in the church. Only when the church at Rome faced no obvious threats to its life and teaching and ceased to be vigilant for the truth did it go astray in doctrine.

Are our churches doctrinally sound? If so, let us strive to keep them that way. To do so, our churches must ensure that all its members, adults as well as youth and children, are thoroughly taught the basic truths of the faith. Then we must periodically remind ourselves of the truth we know, just as Paul reminded the church at Rome. Finally, we must pass on to our children both true doctrine and a love of the same.

### ***4. The mystery of the gospel revealed.***

The mystery of the gospel (v. 25) is no special teaching for the inner circle of the church, no doctrine reserved for the spiritual or intellectual elite. The mystery of the gospel has been revealed to all. It is simply the truth that God saves Jews and Gentiles in the same way, through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not by works of the law, whether delivered to the Jews in written form or known in the hearts of all people. Salvation is through faith in the work of Christ for us. When we put our trust in Jesus Christ God justifies us and gives us new life in him. God has chosen a people for himself from both Jews and Gentiles. Day by day, heart by heart, God is grafting an innumerable multitude of Jews and Gentiles into his spiritual Israel, the church of Jesus Christ. There is but one gospel, one way of salvation for all people. It is the gospel that Paul sets forth so clearly in Romans. The mystery of the gospel is a mystery no more.

Yet the gospel is still a mystery to most of our friends and neighbors, to most of the world. They do not know the way of salvation. We know it. The smallest child who trusts in Jesus knows enough of what was a mystery to be saved. Since we know the truth of salvation while our friends, relations, and neighbors do not, what is our responsibility? What ought we to do?

The Christian who has completed this study should be able to open the Bible to Romans and go through Paul's great letter point by point, explaining the truths of the gospel. He or she should be able to show in Romans what is false about the common errors so widespread even in our supposedly Christian land. God grant that the Christian who has completed this study will be burdened to share the truth of the gospel of eternal life in Christ with others and will be confident that he or she can do so from Romans.