

New Testament Studies

Romans

(RVS Notes)

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Welcome

Welcome to this class in Romans. It is part of the Adult Nurture ministry of National Presbyterian Church (NPC) designed to help you grow in your knowledge of the Christian faith and in your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We desire to engage your mind and enrich your spirit. Our classes range from foundational issues of belief and doctrine to questions of faith and practice, from biblical studies to examination of issues of national and international import, from faith and the arts to stewardship of wealth and the environment. We trust you'll find these classes interesting and stimulating as you study and learn with us.

This class seeks to glean the content of the book of Romans and to discern the distinctive contribution it makes to the whole of the biblical revelation. We seek more than just information in this class. We yearn to know God more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly as a result of our study of His Word.

Taking This Class

This class can be taken in at least three different ways:

1. As a regular Sunday School class where advance preparation by class members is not expected. The class notebook provides the content for each lesson with appendices to supply supporting material. While advance preparation would be helpful to understand the content of each lesson, it is not necessary.
2. As a class with some advance preparation. The syllabus that follows enables you to prepare for each class by reading the class notes and referring to the supporting materials as appropriate. This preparation is not burdensome. The normal weekly reading load will be 3-4 pages of notes.
3. As a class akin to our Guided Tour of the Bible classes. The syllabus details assignments in the notebook. We also recommend using a commentary: N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2004). This commentary can be ordered online, or through a local bookstore, or through a book distributor like the Christian Book Distributors (1-800-247-4784).

Syllabus

September	10	Introduction	RVS Notes	5-9
	17	Romans 1:1-17	RVS Notes	10-13
	24	Romans 1:18-32	RVS Notes	13-18
October	1	Romans 2	RVS Notes	18-22
	8	Romans 3	RVS Notes	22-26
	15	No Class	---	
	22	Romans 4	RVS Notes	26-29
	29	Romans 5	RVS Notes	29-33
November	5	Romans 6	RVS Notes	33-37
	12	Romans 7	RVS Notes	37-40
	19	Romans 8:1-17	RVS Notes	40-44
	26	No Class	---	
December	3	Romans 8:18-39	RVS Notes	44-47
	10	Catch-up; Wrap-up; Romans 1-8 Takeaways		
	17	Catch-up; Wrap-up; Romans 1-8 Takeaways, if necessary		

Romans Introduction

In general—This book is Paul’s magnum opus—the most systematic presentation of the gospel he preached. One writer has described it as “the cathedral of the Christian faith”. Martin Luther wrote: “This epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel . . . It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” Luther's associate, Philip Melancthon, described the book as a timeless treatise, “a compendium of Christian doctrine” that transcends time.

Romans has impacted countless people through the years. There's John Wesley's story. On May 24, 1738, he reluctantly went to a service at Aldersgate Chapel in London. It turned out to be a life-changing experience. The preface to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans was read at this meeting. Wesley recorded his reaction in his journal: “About a quarter before nine, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sin, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Wesley went on and had an incredibly far-reaching ministry. He was a key personality in the Great Awakening that swept over Great Britain and the United States in the 18th century. The same Holy Spirit who so utilized Romans to teach and transform these giants of the faith and do the same for us.

Author and Occasion—Romans was probably composed while Paul was in Corinth in the late 50s, probably around 58 at the close of his third missionary journey. It may have been written during the three-month stopover described in Acts 20:3. He may have been staying with Gaius (16:23) at the time of the letter’s composition. The mention of Erastus, Corinth’s commissioner of public works, and the commendation of Phoebe, who belonged to the church at nearby Cenchrae, further confirms the Corinthian origin of the letter.

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he was writing to a church with whose founding he had nothing whatsoever to do. He did not have previous personal contact with the Roman church. This is very different from almost all of Paul's other letters. Likewise, it is different in another way. Paul's other letters, with perhaps the exception of Ephesians, were driven by the circumstances in which the church addressed was enmeshed. Romans, of all Paul's letters, comes closest to a theological treatise.

He desired to utilize the Roman church as a base of operations in the western portion of the Empire. He wanted to spread the gospel west, as far as Spain. He wrote this letter, setting out the very essence of the gospel he preached, in order that he might find in Rome a sympathetic supporting church for his intended work in the Western Empire.

The believers at Rome were a mixed lot, both Jew and Gentile, albeit primarily Gentile. The church at Rome was composed of many house churches at Rome. The ruins of large basilicas that populate various European cities did not begin to appear on the scene until the third and fourth centuries of our era.

Romans reflects the way ancient letters were commonly composed:

- Greeting (Rom. 1:1);

- Prayer for the health and welfare of the recipients (Rom. 1:7);
- Thanksgiving (Rom. 1:8-15);
- General contents of the letter (main body of Romans);
- Special greetings at the end (Rom. 16).

Likewise, when we say Paul penned this letter, we must not see him as sitting quietly at a desk carefully polishing each sentence as he writes. Paul didn't ordinarily pen his own letters. He typically dictated them to an amanuensis (a secretary with some leeway to capture the author's thought). He is probably striding up and down some small room somewhere in Corinth, pouring out a torrent of words, that his amanuensis is scribbling to get down. In Romans 16:22, Tertius identifies himself as Paul's amanuensis when he slips in his own greeting to the Romans.

Purpose—A threefold purpose for Romans can be discerned:

- To announce Paul's future plans to visit Rome after his return from delivering relief from Gentile believers to the Jerusalem church (15:24, 28-29; Acts 19:21). Paul may have intended to use Rome as a base of operations for the evangelization of Spain and the western part of the Roman Empire, much as he used Antioch as a base for the missionary journeys through Asia Minor and Greece.
- To present a complete and detailed statement of the gospel he preached to people who did not know him and yet may have heard charges against him by various Judaizing groups or other of Paul's detractors.
- To address an underlying tension between Jewish and Gentile segments in the Christian community. In Romans 9-11, one senses that Paul is addressing a very definite undertone among Jewish believers that questioned God's goodness, wisdom, and justice as revealed in His salvation plan, particularly as it bore on the Jew.

Guiding Concepts—

Righteousness—The grand theme of Romans is a righteousness of God revealed in the gospel and appropriated by faith from first to last (1:17). This righteousness is not one of human self-justifying merit but a right standing with God that the Lord Himself provides. It is first imputed to human beings by grace through faith (justification) and then imparted in a progressively transformed lifestyle in the believer (sanctification). The grand hope, expressed so sublimely in Romans 8, is that our lifestyles will one day be perfectly in accord with our righteous standing before God (glorification).

Protestants have traditionally stressed justification by faith, a doctrine emphasized in Romans and Galatians. However, it is important to understand why Paul needed to emphasize this. Most Jews believed that the Jewish people as a whole were saved by God's grace. Jewish Christians recognized that this grace was available only through the Lord Jesus. By what terms would the Gentiles become part of God's people? In arguing for the ethnic unity of God's body, Paul contends that all people come to God on the same terms, no matter what their ethnic, economic, educational, or religious background. He stresses justification by faith, a doctrine most of his readers would know and utilizes it to emphasize reconciliation with one another, a reality that they still needed to learn.

Nature of God—Righteousness necessarily brings God’s mercy and justice into sharp relief. This is developed throughout the letter. God is indeed merciful and gracious and longs to forgive and restore us to a relationship with Himself. The Scriptures say: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4-5a). And again it says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Mercy is unmerited favor from God to erring people who can do nothing to earn it except to hold out our hands.

However, God is also holy and righteous and cannot ignore our sinful state and our constant violation of his commandments. This theme is a dominant one in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul writes: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18). Righteousness is that attribute of God by which God’s nature is seen to be the eternally perfect standard of what is right. His judgment is not arbitrary or capricious, but principled and without respect of persons. All will be judged appropriately. No breaks. No payoffs. No inequity. He is the standard for a moral universe and if there is no consequence for doing wrong, then doing wrong becomes alright. The ultimate consequence of wrong not judged is a lawless universe, a hell here on earth in our present order.

Human sin dilemma—Humanity’s fundamental problem is more serious than a few “boys will be boys” peccadilloes. Romans 1-3 develops the theme of human depravity – sin has twisted every aspect of our being. Humans may not be as bad as they possibly can be, but we are wrong at the root in every facet of our being. The licentious pagan (1:18-32) as well as the moral Gentiles and self-righteous Jews (2:1-3:8) are all on the same plane—lost in sin with no humanly devised way out (3:9-20). Paul develops the theme of original sin in Romans 5, implicating the entire race in Adam’s fall.

Jew-Gentile integration—Roman Christians were in the midst of what we would now call ethnic reconciliation and cross-cultural understanding. Paul reminds his Jewish readers that they are lost without Christ just as the Gentiles (Rom. 1-3); that spiritual, not ethnic, descent from Abraham is what matters (Rom. 4; 9); that Jews are also descended from Adam and share his nature (5:12-21); and that the law (i.e. Torah) does not and never did justify Israel (Rom. 7; 10). He also reminds the Gentiles that they were grafted into Judaism and therefore dare not share common anti-Semitic traits (Rom. 11) and that they must respect Jewish practices (Rom. 14). Christ (Rom. 15:1-13) and Paul (Rom. 15:14-33) are agents of reconciliation and unity (Rom. 16:17-20).

The Jews had a problem with Jesus as the Messiah and with the shift from the Old to the New Covenant. Paul answers the critic who asks why God’s chosen people had failed to respond to their Messiah’s claims by delineating God’s purposes for both Jew and Gentile.

Election—In discussing the problem of Jewish rejection of their Messiah, Paul asserts the doctrine of divine election. Human beings, Jew or Gentile, have no claim on God, but God is faithful to His promise and His covenant, though we be faithless.

Function of Law—The Law was never meant to be a means for people to achieve righteousness before God, but rather a means of showing people the impossibility of such a feat. The Law’s revelation prevents people from “dummying down” what it means to have fellowship with a holy God so that they may cast themselves upon God’s grace alone.

Book Synopsis and Outline—

The structure of the letter falls into four main divisions:

- Chapters 1-8 deals with the problem of righteousness. The first part of Romans traces the significance of the gospel from condemnation (1:18-3:20) to justification (3:21-5:21) to sanctification (6:1-8:39) to glorification (see ch. 8). In this development, the book focuses on the doctrines of sin and salvation.
- Chapters 9-11 deals with the problem of the Jews. What happened here? Is there an undertone among Jewish believers that questioned God's goodness, wisdom, and justice as revealed in His salvation plan, particularly as it bore on them? Did God give up on His covenant and abandon His Old Testament people?
- Chapters 12-15 deals with practical questions of living. Paul provides practical exhortation for the outworking of righteousness in the daily lives of the Roman believers. He also included his own plans for future missionary work.
- Chapter 16 is a letter of introduction for Phoebe and a list of final greetings. The chapter is something of a problem. Paul greets by name far more people in this chapter than in any other letter. Yet, he had never set foot in Rome.

Romans begins by taking you into a courtroom. Paul calls both Gentiles and Jews to the stand and grills them, finding them guilty before God's impartial judgment (Romans 1-3). Then he presents and explains God's marvelous salvation by faith, how he makes us right (Romans 3:21-5:21). But if we are made right by faith in God's substitutionary atonement and not by our behavior, why not go on sinning. It's what we do best and, according to your argument Paul, it shows the rightness of God's law. This leads Paul to explain our ongoing experience of being made right in sanctification—our victory, liberty, and security (Romans 6-8). Then he takes an excursus in Romans 9-11. What about the Jews and God's fidelity to His covenant? Then, in Romans 12-15, he deals with the practical outworking of being made right with God and others in the daily life of the believer. Finally, in Romans 15 and 16, Paul explains his future plans and greets his friends at Rome.

Our working outline for part 1 of our study of Romans 1-8 is as follows:

I. Introduction (1:1-17)

- A. Salutation (1:1-7)
- B. Thanksgiving for the recipients (1:8-15)
- C. Theme stated (1:16-17)

II. Need for Salvation: Plight of Humanity Lost in Sin (1:18-3:20)

- A. For the riotous pagan (1:18-32)
- B. For the moral pagan and the religious Jew (2:1-3:8)
 - 1. Impartiality of judgment (2:1-16)
 - 2. Jewish advantages to no avail (2:17-3:8)
- C. All fall short (3:9-20)

III. Justification: Imputation of Righteousness (3:21-5:21)—How we are rightly related to God

- A. Justification by faith described (3:21-31)

- B. Abraham as illustrating justification by faith (4:1-25)
 - 1. Basic case stated (4:1-8)
 - 2. Promise apart from circumcision (4:9-12)
 - 3. Promise apart from law (4:13-17)
 - 4. Abraham's faith as the standard for every believer (4:18-25)
- C. Benefits of justification described (5:1-11)
- D. Applicability of justification: death in Adam/ life in Christ (5:12-21)

IV. Sanctification: Impartation of Righteousness (6:1-8:39)—How we are set apart to God

- A. Believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection life (6:1-23)
 - 1. Know—what we need to know to live right (6:1-10)
 - 2. Consider/count/reckon—moving out on what we know (6:11-14)
 - 3. Present/yield—serving a new master (6:15-23)
- B. Believer and the law (7:1-25)
 - 1. Deliverance from law (7:1-6)
 - 2. Law and sin: what's the gig? (7:7-25)
- C. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)
 - 1. Liberation from the law of sin and death (8:1-11)
 - 2. Additional ministries of the Spirit—groanings (8:12-27)
 - a. Children of God led by the Spirit (8:12-17)
 - b. Creation's renewal patiently awaited (8:18-25)
 - c. Spirit's intercession for us (8:26-27)
 - 3. Security and permanence of life in the Spirit (8:28-39)

Romans Notes

I. Introduction (1:1-17)—Romans reflects the way ancient letters were commonly composed. It opens with the author identifying himself and greeting his recipients (1:1), continues with a prayer for the health and welfare of the recipients (1:7), followed by a thanksgiving for them (1:8-15), before moving to the theme of the letter (1:16-17). This opening is somewhat unique among Paul's letters because of the extended elaboration on the apostle's call and on the gospel he preached (1:2-6).

A. Salutation (1:1-7)—Paul describes himself and his role (1:1), the gospel he preaches (1:2-6), and greets the recipients of the letter (1:7). The salutations that introduce New Testament letters are what the people of the day called *ethos*. They introduced letters and speeches of a persuasive nature by establishing the writer's credibility to address the particular subject matter. They didn't prove the writer's point, but attempted to dispose the audience to respectfully hear him out. Why should they listen to what he had to say? That's the question Paul is answering in the opening verses of Romans 1.

Paul's opening greeting to the Romans could be summarized from verses 1 and 7: Paul, a bondservant of the Lord Jesus to all in Rome who love God; grace and peace to you. Why the expanded greeting? Because he wants to lay out what the Gospel actually is. It further defines his own role (1:1, 5) and claims the whole world in its embrace. It is about what God has done in Jesus, the Messiah, Israel's true king and the world's true Lord. Jesus is the son of God, coming from a royal house far older than anything Rome can claim (1:2-4).

1:1—Paul describes himself as a servant (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ. That word describes at one and the same time an obligation of a bonded person who is honored to be so bonded. He also describes himself as an apostle (*apostolos*), a sent one who had been set apart for a particular task (to preach to the Gentiles (1:5)).

1:2-6—Paul describes the nature of the gospel he preaches. The good news is the message that the Lord Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again, and is now able to save to the uttermost those who trust in Him. It was promised in the prophetic Scriptures. This is more than a prediction in advance. It is a commitment by the Almighty to make good the promise of a redemptive word.

This gospel is all about God's Son. Paul focuses on two things:

- The incarnation—Jesus is by human nature a Davidic descendant and by divine nature God's very unique Son. Ireneaus, a second century bishop of Lyons, once remarked: “He became what we are, to make us what He is.”
- The resurrection—Jesus' unique personhood is clearly indicated and indisputably proclaimed by the fact of His physical resurrection.

Interestingly, this initial statement about the gospel is all about the person of the Lord Jesus. Nothing is said of His redeeming work, albeit much will be said later in the letter (see 3:21-26; 4:25; 5:6-21).

1:5-6—He was a missionary to the Gentiles. Missionary is the Latin form of apostle, one who is sent. Paul was called to a special work among the Gentiles and it was in pursuing this calling that he was

intending to travel to Rome.

The “we” of this verse has occasioned discussion. Is this a literary “we”, referring to Paul's unique ministry to the Gentiles (see 15:16, 18) or does “we” have a wider reference to all the apostles taking the gospel to all nations and all people? However taken, the desired result is clear—“obedience that comes from faith” among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

1:7—Paul finally gets around to identifying the recipients of this letter. The Romans are beloved of God, called to be set apart for Him, to whom he extends the greeting of “grace and peace”. Paul desires his readers to have a continuing and deepening experience of spiritual blessing that only God can bestow. “Greetings” (*charein*) was a Greek term related to “grace” (*charis*) and Jewish letters frequently opened with the salutation of “peace”.

Many of the founders of the Roman church were Jewish Christians (see Acts 2:10). Sometime in the 40s, the emperor Claudius expelled the Jewish community from Rome (see Acts 18:2; and recorded by historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius). The Roman church was composed of Gentiles until Claudius' death, when his edict was automatically repealed and the Jewish Christians returned to Rome. Jewish and Gentile believers had different cultural ways of expressing their faith. Paul was addressing a church that was experiencing tension between these cultural groupings.

B. Thanksgiving for the recipients (1:8-15)—Thanksgiving for the readers was standard fare in the openings of ancient letters. Paul acknowledges the sincerity of their faith (1:8-9), his intercession for them (1:9-10), his longing to come and visit them (1:11-13) and to preach the gospel he was called to preach (1:14-15). The tone is quite complimentary of the Roman Christians. One commentary describes this thanksgiving as the “courtesy of greatness”. We get far more out of people by praising them than by criticizing them. People who get the best out of others are those who insist on seeing others at their best.

So how did the Roman church get started? According to early memories in Christian tradition recorded in the second century, Peter had gone to Rome after his narrow escape in Acts 12 and preached the gospel to the sizable Jewish community there. Christians met in the homes of individuals for worship, prayer, teaching, and to celebrate the Eucharist. N.T. Wright thinks that there were probably not more than 100 or so believers in a city that was approaching 1,000,000 inhabitants. The Christians were seen as a suspect sect of Judaism and a sect that made other Jews (those troublesome rebels) angry. Claudius had banned the Jews from Rome in 49, but the Jews were allowed back after Nero ascended to the throne in 54. So, in the last years of Claudius' reign, the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles and then the Jews and Jewish Christians came back. Rome was be a microcosm of the kind of Jewish-Gentile tensions in the early church.

1:12—His thanksgiving for the Romans is based on their faith in Jesus Christ. He longs to minister to them and build them up in the faith. This desire has a mutuality in it. There is ample room for mutual encouragement and edification.

1:14—Paul says he's obligated to Greeks and non-Greeks. But he's writing to the Romans. What's this Greek stuff about? The following phrase clarifies. He's obligated both to the wise and the foolish. By this time, “Greek” had lost its racial sense. The conquests of Alexander had taken the Greek language and thought throughout the world. To be a Greek was to be of a certain mind, spirit, and culture. The

Greeks fancied themselves the wise, and the non-Greek barbarians, the foolish and uncultured. Paul was called to minister to the wise and the simple, the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated.

The obligation to preach the gospel probably hints at Paul's desire to use the Roman congregation as a springboard to take the gospel further west to Spain. He will develop that later in the letter (15:23-24).

C. Theme of the letter stated (1:16-17)—Paul is ready to challenge the prevailing philosophies and religions of Rome that vie for people's attention. The Gospel is described as having power for salvation to those who believe. Power (*dunamis*) in this setting conveys the gospel's inherent efficacy to offer someone the way to be rightly related to God.

Salvation (*soterion*) refers to God's deliverance to a sound or whole condition. The word can have a physical or spiritual import, but in this context, clearly spiritual. People in this age and in every age felt the need for deliverance. They felt the need for what Seneca described as “a hand let down to lift us up”. The Latin philosopher thought the people of his day were overwhelmingly conscious of “their weakness and their inefficiency in necessary things”. This salvation is not something that comes by and by, but is present, rescuing people from the state of sin. It is a present reality and a glorious future hope.

It is for everyone who believes, for those with a settled conviction that through the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, God is putting back together a broken people and a broken world. People's faith (*fides*) must be engaged for this dynamic to come to its desired result. The efficacy of this salvation depends on the willingness of a person to receive (believe) the message. Faith is an enduring devotion and loyalty which marks the true follower of the Lord Jesus. It encompasses the conviction that the gospel is true (2 Cor. 13:5) It calls for total acceptance and absolute trust—betting your life on the Lord Jesus.

Illustrative quote—Robert Louis Stevenson once remarked: “I believe in God and if I woke up in hell I would still believe in Him.”

Faith begins with receptivity, goes on to mental assent, and progresses to total reliance. Paul's phrase “to the Jew first and then to the Gentile” simply references the New Testament pattern of offering the gospel first to the lost sheep of Israel in the Lord's ministry (see Jn. 1:11) and then in the apostolic era (see Acts 13:45-46; 28:25, 28).

One of the most explosive things about the gospel is that it broke down barriers between human beings, specifically then between Jew and Gentile. God's saving power is no respecter of ethnic divides. God's covenant with Abraham was always intended as the means by which the Creator would rescue the world and people from every race from evil, corruption, and death.

Paul was not ashamed to preach the gospel. He could have been cowed coming to the metropolis of the world from an insignificant province in the corner of Empire. Christians in that day certainly were not among the elite of Roman society. Rome had numerous philosophers and philosophies. Why pay attention to some fable of a Jew who came back from the dead? To think that a little Jewish tent-maker would have the cheek to preach such a message to the mucky mucks of the world was humorous.

He lists his reasons for not being ashamed—

- Gospel's origin (1:16a)—it is the gospel of the Lord Jesus. It is a message from and about the very Son of God.
- Gospel's power (1:16b)—Paul was taking to Rome the power to change lives. Rome may have had military power, but down in its bowels it was a weak society. It was increasingly a dissolute society and culture.
- Gospel's outcome (1:16c)—it is the power of God unto salvation. Indeed, salvation is the major theme of this letter.
- Gospel's reach (1:16d)—to everyone who believes. God does not ask people to behave first in order to be saved, but to believe.

1:17—This is the key text for the entire book. The word translated righteousness (*dikaioisune*) is used in one way or another (righteous, just, justified) over 60 times in Romans. God reveals a righteousness that is by faith. This verse has two puzzling expressions:

- “[A] righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (literally “from faith to faith”). Does this mean from the faith of the preacher to that of the hearer, or from Old Testament faith to New Testament faith, or entirely of faith (as the NIV takes the phrase), or from God's faithfulness to human faith?
- “The righteous shall live by faith” could also be translated “The one who is righteous by virtue of faith shall live”. This is a quote from Habakkuk. 2:4 which also appears in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. Romans explains “the just”, Galatians elaborates on “shall live”, and Hebrews discourses about “by faith”.

Righteousness or justification (*dikaioisune*) is used by Paul in a very different way than we typically do in English. In our use, if we justify ourselves, we produce reasons to prove that we were right. If someone else justifies us, they produce reasons why we acted properly. However, in Greek, that word doesn't mean to prove or make a person something but to treat, account, or reckon a person as something. Justification is to be rightly related to God. It means that God treats sinners like us as if we were not sinners at all. He doesn't treat us as bad people and enemies, but as good people and friends. This right relationship is not because we meticulously performed the works of the law, but because, by utter faith, we cast ourselves on the amazing mercy of God.

II. Need for Salvation: Plight of Humanity Lost in Sin (1:18-3:20)—Hear ye! Hear ye! The court is now in session. This portion of the book puts all humanity in the dock. It concludes that the riotous Gentile world is guilty (1:18-32), that the moral pagan and the Jew are guilty (2:1-3:8), and everybody is guilty (3:9-20). This is the mother lode of an indictment.

Right standing with God received by faith is the theme of the first part of the letter. Paul explains that this is necessary because sin has gained a stranglehold on all people (1:18-3:20). God's righteous anger and indictment stands over the Gentiles lost in their sin and idolatry (1:18-32). The Jews have even less excuse. Although they have the law, they don't obey it. Its possession and the outward mark of God's covenant (circumcision) avails them nothing (2:1-3:8). Paul concludes that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are helpless slaves to sin and cannot be made right by anything they do (3:9-20). Paul's method strikes the modern mind as decidedly negative. However, until people are persuaded of their dire need, they are not likely to be concerned about deliverance.

A. For the riotous pagan (1:18-32)—There is a correlation between the revelation of God's salvation in the gospel and His judgment of sin in history. Paul starts with the riotous people who embody the terrible corruption and perversion of human life. As he discusses this, the apostle is telling us that the degrading depths sin is itself a present judgment of sin by God.

Illustration—This section is like driving through a neighborhood you don't want to be in. Roll up your windows, lock your doors, and don't stop.

Years ago, I was on a business trip to the city in which I was born—Detroit, Michigan. My presentation for the conference we were participating in was scheduled for the morning, and my bosses kindly let me have the afternoon off to see my birthplace. I wanted to visit the hospital in which I was born. The Renaissance building where the conference was being held was posh. The area where I was born wasn't that far away—and what a difference! It was like a war zone! It couldn't have been like that thirty some years earlier when I was born. My mother walked to her job in the neighborhood until two weeks before I was born. Wow! What a change!

The ark of human history is not one of a bestial lunk worshiping many gods turning into a conscientious monotheist. That is the myth of the progressive—humanity onward and upward. What is presented here is something very different. People began knowing the true God, turned from the truth desiring to be like God, and rejected Him. The self-sovereign ones were deceived into thinking they could replace the true Sovereign One. That central deception led to distorted thinking, darkened hearts, and shameful behavior. That deception and its sad consequences continue in our time.

1:18-23—Suppressing the truth leads to distorted thinking, darkened hearts, and futile idolatry—God's righteous anger (1:18) is expressed against human wickedness that suppresses the truth about God's character and work (1:19-20), which they completely distort in the darkness of their thinking and in their pursuit of false gods (1:21-23).

Because God is God, He is characteristically holy. He cannot tolerate sin. The wrath of God is His annihilating reaction against sin. Martin Luther spoke of God's love as God's own work, but of God's wrath as His strange work. The Old Testament prophets frequently warned the people of God's righteous anger (His wrath). The message was clear—there is a moral order to this world. God made things in such a way that to violate His laws, to break the moral order of the world, was to put yourself at peril.

The central problem is human rebellion. Paul begins a section of the letter in discussing this. Humanity in general, not just in particular obvious examples, is rotten in the inside and this rot reveals itself in corruption, disintegration, and decay. The rot first reveals itself, not in obvious corrupt behavior but in distorted thinking and in darkened hearts. We grow an expanding capacity for self-deception, thinking ourselves virtuous and wise. We easily deceive ourselves, especially when our own interests and desires are concerned.

We can make two types of mistakes in thinking about God's patience and final judgment of evil. First, that there is no glimmer of good in the world. We should punt on service, secure ourselves as we can, and wait for the end. Second, that evil isn't really all that serious, a reality that can be confined. Oh, never mind the generations of wickedness on an ever-growing scale. We'll progress beyond it, bye and bye. A secular heaven is touted as awaiting a world which refuses to recognize anything beyond it. In

our current situation, our society seems locked into the second view. However, the gospel is clear. The situation is dangerously diseased and progressively so. It needs the radical treatment of an energized gospel.

1:18—A word about the wrath of God. To the modern mind this is an unacceptable concept. The default understanding of wrath by many is uncontrolled human anger expressed in a savage and vengeful way. However, God's wrath is not malevolent and capricious. He does not lash out indiscriminately and wildly. His anger is not temperamental, but just and impartial. Its object is twofold—the godlessness of humanity, a lack of reverence and an impiety that arrays people against God (1:19-27), and human wickedness and injustice toward other people (1:28-32).

Later in Romans, Paul will speak of God's patience with this ugly scene. What this expression of God's wrath means is that God will not let the types of activity and behavior that signal a creeping death that results from distorted thinking and darkened hearts to go on indefinitely. That type of activity defaces and damages the world and the human beings that occupy it. God is good and must put things to rights.

1:19-20—Natural revelation, what can be known of God through the created order, leaves people without excuse. It is plainly set before people and understood by them. It is a constant testimony from the creation of the world, but a limited one. God's power and some aspects of His nature can be discerned, but not His love and grace. Stoic philosophers agreed with Paul's assertion here that the nature of God was evident in the created order. Cicero went so far as to assert that no race of humanity was so “uncivilized” as to deny the existence of the gods.

1:21-23—Paul begins to unfold humanity's descent. People don't glorify God nor express thanksgiving to Him. Their distorted thinking and darkened hearts shows up in the failure of worship, the failure to give God His due. Instead of true worship, we grow attached to idols, to non-gods of our own making.

Paul may have the mythology and idolatry of his own age in the back of his mind here which grew out of the insistent need of people to recognize some greater power than themselves in the universe coupled with their refusal to grant any supreme being the place of supremacy. The sophisticated West doesn't worship carved gods of wood and stone, but we do bow down before money, sex, and power. When worship fails, humanity eventually, and often quickly, descends into injustice, where human society gets progressively out of joint. Truth becomes a casualty and people eagerly accept ever-changing, pedaled nonsense.

Idolatry was understood as the final stage of the progression of sin's evil impulse in the human heart. It is interesting to note that the description of pagan idolatry is steeped in Old Testament texts describing Israel's idolatry (see Deut. 4:16-20; Ps. 106:20; Jer. 2:11). Is this a literary coincidence or a set-up for the argument for Jewish readers in Romans 2?

As for Gentile accountability for their wayward thinking and behavior, Jewish tradition had it that God had given seven laws to Noah after the flood for which all humanity was responsible. Jewish pride amplified this tradition, asserting that, unlike Israel who had to keep 613 commandments in the law (by rabbinical count), the Gentiles disobeyed even the seven laws of Noah.

1:24-28—**God gives them over to depraved desires that degrade their bodies**—The refrain “God gave them over” (see 1:24, 26, 28) explains how God's righteous anger with sin works. He lets people

damn themselves as they warp their own humanity. As He did in the Old Testament, God gives people over to their own hardness of heart. From idolatry to immorality is one short step. If people are their own god or make their own gods, then they can make up the rules and do whatever they please. Self-deification often leads to an enslaving self-indulgence.

God permitted them to go on into their sin and reap its sad consequence. His righteous anger wasn't satisfied by fire and brimstone in the immediate instance but by abandoning people to their sinful ways. The repetition of the phrase "God gave them over" in 1:24, 26, and 28 is telling. Humanity out of joint is the result of God allowing people to follow their lusts wherever they may lead. He is serious about the structure built into the world and serious about the responsibility of humankind to nurture this. False worship born of distorted thinking and darkened hearts leads us down the path of a creeping death and the decay that attends that way.

1:24-25—Sinful desires (*epithumia*) is a key idea in this passage. It means a reaching out after pleasure which defies all reason. It involves a passionate desire for forbidden pleasure; a desire that makes people do nameless and shameless things. Paul speaks of God abandoning people to these unclean desires which lead to debasing acts. The most terrible thing about sin is its enslaving power. Sin gives rise to further sin and to a debilitating downward spiral.

1:26-27—The age Paul described was one that to its travelers seemed—

- Out of control. Virgil, the Roman poet, wrote: "Right and wrong are confounded; so many wars the world over, so many forms of wrong; no worthy honor left to the plow ...". Tacitus, the historian, wrote: "I am entering upon the history of a period, rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with sedition, savage in its very hours of peace ...". Livy, the historian, wrote: "Rome could neither bear its ills nor the remedies that might have cured them." To Seneca, the age seemed "stricken with the agitation of soul no longer the master of itself."
- An age of luxury—In Juvenal's words "Money, the nurse of debauchery ... and enervating riches sapped the sinews of the age with foul luxury." Crime became the antidote to boredom until, as Tacitus said: "the greater the infamy, the wilder the delight."
- An age of immorality—Clement of Alexandria, a third century believer, spoke of the typical Roman society lady as "girt like Venus with a golden girdle of vice". Juvenal cited Agrippina, the wife of the Emperor Claudius, leaving the royal palace at night and going down to the brothel out of sheer lust. "They show a dauntless spirit in those things they basely desire."

The text takes aim at sexual sin. Greek men of the day were often bisexual. Not only was homosexual behavior approved, but in some cases (see Plato's *Symposium*), it was deemed superior. Elements of the culture of the day even socialized boys in that sexual direction. The Jews generally recoiled at this practice, disdaining it as a distinctly Gentile vice. The Jewish folk and Roman Christians would say a hardy "Amen" to Paul's discussion here.

Throughout his argument in this section of the book, Paul assumes a structure. He sees human beings created in the image of God and given charge over the rest of creation. We are commanded to be fruitful and multiply, to celebrate our co-creative role in sexuality, and enjoy the life sustaining capacity of God's good world. We are to be stewards of this world, bringing order.

This helps explain why Paul focuses on homosexuality as a first instance of corruption. He is not

saying that this practice is uniquely off-base and always exploitative. He is saying that the distortion in the Creator's life-giving intention in heterosexual love indicates the beginning of a character-twisting idolatry. Homosexuality is seen as a sign that the world God intended is out of joint. This is certainly not the last word on homosexuality. However, we need to realize in the polemic and rhetoric that surrounds this topic in our modern world, that the Scripture is presenting a deep theology of what it means to be genuinely human and warning of our capacity for self-deception.

1:29-32—Vice list; Behavior resulting from depraved thinking and desires—When people banish God from their lives, they begin to take on certain characteristics. This passage is one of the most terrible descriptions of the kind of people they become. They not only lose any sense of godliness, but of their essential humanity as well.

Paul employs a vice list as a crescendo to this indictment of the pagans. Paul elaborates on the wickedness that the depraved mind produces. He describes the havoc in human relations when people suppress or deny the knowledge of God. The classification of this list of offenses eludes us and that reality in itself is a testimony to the irrationality of sin and to its disordering effects. Note Paul's long list of descriptive terms. A most chilling list!

- Wickedness (*adikia*)—If *dikaioisune* describes one who does justice, giving God and people their due, *adikia* describes the person who robs people and God of their proper rights.
- Evil or villainy (*poneria*)—This is more than badness. It entails the desire to do harm. It is callous cruelty; the active, deliberate will to corrupt and inflict injury. One of Satan's common titles is that of the evil one (*ho poneros*).
- Greed or the lust to get (*pleonixia*)—The spirit that grasps at things it has no right to take. It is predatory greed, the desire that knows no law, no boundaries.
- Depravity or viciousness (*kakia*)—This is the general word for badness, It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sins flourish.
- Envy (*phthonos*)—Good envy reveals to people their weakness and inadequacy and make them eager to copy some good example. Bad envy is essentially grudging, resenting the good example and desiring to tear it down. It is one of the most warped and twisted of human emotions.
- Murder (*phonos*)—Jesus immeasurably widened the scope of this word to include the spirit of sustained anger and hatred.
- Strife (*eris*)—This is contention born of envy, ambition, and the desire for prestige, place, and prominence. It is a God given gift to be able to take as much pleasure in the successes of others as in your own.
- Deceit (*dolos*)—The quality of the twisted mind, unable to act in a straightforward way. It describes the crafty cunning of those who are forever plotting and scheming.
- Malice (*kakoetheia*)—This is literally “having an evil nature”. The spirit that puts the worst construction on everything. The 17th century theologian, Jeremy Taylor, described this as a baseness of nature that takes things by the wrong handle and expounds things in the worst sense. Pliny, a first century Roman thinker, described it as an interpretation that maligns.
- Gossips and slanderers (*psithuristes* and *katalalos*)—The secret whisperer who delights in destroying other people's reputations.
- Haters of God (*theostugeis*)—One who would eliminate the God who limits his license to do whatever he wants.
- Insolent (*hubristes*)—This term composes both those proudly defiant of God and those who are

wantonly and sadistically cruel. It's the type of pride that settles into a sadism that delights in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them.

- Arrogant (*huperephanos*)—One who exudes the air of contempt and delights in making others feel small. Scripture clearly indicates that God resists such people (Prov. 3:34; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pt. 5:5).
- Boastful or braggarts (*alazon*)—The pretentious snob. The spirit that pretends to have what it has not.
- Inventors of evil (*epheuretes kakon*)—Those who seek new, obscure, or subtle vices because they have grown bored and need a new thrill.
- Disobedient to parents (*goneusin apeitheis*)—When the bonds of family are loosened or destroyed, wholesale degeneracy follows.
- Senseless (*asunetos*)—One who will not learn from experience.
- Faithless (*asunthetos*)—Essential dishonesty. People whose word is worthless.
- Without natural affections (*astorgos*)—*Storge* was the Greek word for family love. *Astorgos* is the negation of that family love. This was an age where family love was dying.
- Ruthless or pitiless (*aneleemon*)—This describes the spirit where the quality of mercy is gone.

The first set of these descriptors of sin—wickedness, evil, greed and depravity—are a broad and generic description of sin. The rest of the list in 1:29b-31 constitutes a thorough indictment of humanity denying and raising its fist at God. Romans 1:32 is stark! Not only do people do things that are shameful, but approve and eagerly affirm others who do likewise. They applaud people for their vileness and wickedness. Instead of repenting of their misdeeds, they promote wrongdoing in a defiant revolt against God and any standard of behavior.

The line between good and evil runs, not between “us” and “them”, but down the middle of each of us. Paul shows us what life looks like when God lets us have our own way. Human thinking and behavior begin to deconstruct altogether. God's structure is built into the fabric of the world. Evil is inherently destructive, self-deceptive, and self-affirming. The conclusion of Romans 1 is the chilling sight of future death creeping into the present and casting its dark shadow.

B. For the moral pagan and the religious Jew (2:1-3:8)—Human inadequacy in light of divine standards of judgment continue to characterize the discussion. In this section, the situation of the ethical person (or at least a self-styled ethical person) and/or the religious Jew are the focus just as the riotous pagan was in the previous section.

There is disagreement as to the intended audience for this passage. Some think that Paul is addressing moral pagans in 2:1-16 and Jewish people in 2:17-3:8. Others think that the entire section is directed towards the Jews. They assert that Paul's discussion of the law in 2:12-16 makes sense if he's addressing Jews, but not if he's addressing Gentiles. In 2:17, he directly addresses his reader as a Jew, which seems strange if the first part of the chapter was really addressed to moral pagans.

The Jews thought they occupied a privileged position with God. God was the judge of the Gentiles, but the special protector of the Jews. Paul points out that the Jews were sinners like the Gentiles and they would be judged on the basis of their racial heritage but by the kind of lives they live. He reminds them of four things:

- that they were trading on the mercy of God;

- that they were taking the mercy of God as an invitation to sin rather than as an incentive to repent;
- that there was no most favored nation clause in God's scheme of things;
- that God would settle with each of us according to our deeds.

1. Impartiality of judgment (2:1-16)—God is kind but impartial. His judgment is not arbitrary or capricious, but principled and without respect of persons. All will be judged appropriately. No breaks. No payoffs. No inequity. He judges on the basis of reality, not by appearances. He judges on what is actually done, not on the basis of good intentions or a theoretical ought. His kindness does not lead Him to skew the standard. He is the standard for a moral universe and if there is no consequence for doing wrong, then doing wrong becomes alright. The ultimate consequence of wrong not judged is a lawless universe, a permanent hell on earth.

Paul is preaching here in a lively diatribe style. That was a style of teaching used in ancient schools generally characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors. The upshot is that God demanded consistency and judged impartially (2:6, 11); to doers of good there will be future rewards (2:7a, 10b); to the wicked, there will be punishment (2:8-9).

Human beings throughout time have reflected, in puzzled fashion, how people can know the right thing to do and yet fail to do it. Over and over again, people have deceived themselves into thinking that education and willpower can lead them to rise above it all and live a life of virtue that all truly sensible people aspire to. Nonsense, is the apostle's verdict on this line of thought. You who sit in judgment on the benighted souls described in Romans 1 are without excuse because you secretly do (or yearn to do) the same things you condemn. God will indeed put things to rights, but in a completely impartial way.

2:1-4—The Jew and the pagan moralist would both agree in Paul's condemnation of the riotous lifestyle condemned in Romans 1. Seneca described Rome in his day as “a cesspool of iniquity” and the writer Juvenal called it “the filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood”. However, the ethical person often fails to realize his own plight. There are people who are so taken by the faults of others as to fail to observe their own shortcomings. They tend to understand evil as something “they” (those other people) are, but not “us”. The “righteous” concern of the religious or morally conscious person simply makes them all the more fit for God's impartial judgment.

The philosophers saw sin as moral folly but were befuddled by the reality of it in their lives and in others. Their thinking and their doing couldn't come together. The Jews had their 613 commandments, extrapolated from the Mosaic law, and prided themselves on trying to keep it. However, they externalized it and even then had to admit that everyone sinned.

2:4—In this verse, Paul uses three rich words to describe God—

- Kindness (*chrestotes*)—this describes someone who is always kind;
- Forbearance (*anochē*)—This is the word for a truce, a cessation of hostility. But it has a limit. It is supplying a window of opportunity that must be heeded;
- Patience (*makrothumia*)—A characteristic Greek word that speaks of patience with people. One who has the power to avenge, but deliberately does not use that power.

2:5-11—This passage has the flavor of the Day of the Lord passages in the Old Testament (Isa. 2:6ff;

13:6, 9, 13; Ezek. 30:2-3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14-2:2; Mal. 3:2; 4:5). This judgment is based on the works of the law. This text does not teach salvation by good deeds and works but that God's judgment is an impartial one. He judges according to our deeds, impartially and in truth. This impartial standard is precisely why salvation by grace is necessary. No one, Jew or Gentile, passes this impartial judgment. No one lives up to the strict standards of the law.

2:12-16—Paul speaks of how God's impartial judgment works. He speaks of the Jewish law, the Torah. The Gentiles didn't possess that. Surely, Paul's Jewish kin would argue, the possession of God's law matters. Not if you don't keep it is the apostle's reply.

Paul goes on to describe a judgment based on what we do. A limited or selective obedience to God's revealed will doesn't cut it. Paul is removing the flimsy edifice of humanly contrived righteousness based on human effort. What will occur in judgment is God's assessment of human beings laid bare of all their secrets and pretense (2:16).

Those who sin apart from law or under law will be judged. This seems, on its face, radically different than what the apostle will proclaim in the very next chapter where he will wax eloquent on justification by faith. The contrast between judgment according to works and justification by faith is not one between a system by which God would have liked to operate and an alternative one He had to move to. It is a contrast between a future judgment based on works and a present anticipation of that verdict based on faith in the covenant faithfulness of God and the new humanity created in Jesus Christ.

To the point of setting things to rights. The world is not in the hands of a God blind to its rebellion. It is not subject to a God who is capricious and akin to so many human judges. Justice will be done and to be seen to be done. The law didn't give the Jews or anyone else an out, it only magnified their responsibility and their failure.

2:14-15—What are we to make of Paul talking about the Gentiles of doing by nature things required by the law and being a law for themselves? Is he suggesting that the ethical Gentile does not have a sin nature like the rest of humankind? Or is he suggesting that the Gentiles were not given the law and could allege that they didn't know any better? Neither.

Paul answers establishing two significant principles:

- We will be judged by what we had the opportunity to know. We will be held to our devotion to the highest that was possible for us to know.
- Even those who did not have the written law, had an unwritten law in their hearts. They have an instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. There is in the very nature of our humanity and inbred sense of “ought”. The Stoics described this sense of ought as *phusis* (nature) and urged their followers to live *kata phusin* (according to nature).

The upshot of this is that the Jews would be judged by the law and the Gentiles by a God-given conscience. Both would fail the test.

2. Jewish advantages to no avail (2:17-3:8)—Human inadequacy in light of divine standards of judgment is Paul's ongoing theme. He is demonstrating that all humanity is lost, having begun with the riotous pagan (1:18-32), continuing with upbraiding ethical and religious people by underlining God's impartiality (2:1-16), and now confronts the religious Jew head-on (2:17-3:8). Paul begins by speaking

to the advantages of the Jew in possessing the Law (2:19-24) and in the distinctive mark of circumcision (2:25-29). In both cases, those advantages are offset by Jewish boastfulness and fruitlessness. In 3:1-8, the apostle introduces a new factor in the discussion, that of Jewish failure to respond to God by trust and obedience which occasioned God's judgment of them. Jewishness is not a matter of racial identity at all, but of conduct. To be a real Jew is not a matter of pedigree, but of character.

2:17-24—Obedience to the law, not its possession is what matters—God had chosen Israel and given them His law in order to make them a beacon of light to the rest of the world. You see that in the Abrahamic Covenant, right from the beginning in Genesis 12 and in its various reiterations to the patriarchs. Israel failed in this task, indeed imploded and separated itself from this task, despising Gentiles and others outside their ranks. They were not a conduit of grace to others, but a self-contained community of self-righteous legalism which had lost sight of their calling. Jewish practice had ossified in external and sanctimonious regulations, not in inner devotion. On the outside, some may have been ceremonially clean, but on the inside? The Lord's indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23, illustrated this issue perfectly. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 (2:24) for the idea that instead of glorifying God among the Gentiles, the Jews were actually dishonoring Him. The pagans had contact with the Jews in daily life and were not fooled by outward devotion to the law.

2:17-20—Paul begins by citing the advantages of the Jew. He concedes that the Law brings knowledge of God and that its teaching is far superior to being left to one's own devices. However, this advantage had caused the Jews to see themselves as superior to Gentiles. Paul proceeds to expose Jewish pride and boasting as utterly ridiculous.

2:21-24—In this passage, Paul says that there were Jews whose conduct dishonored Yahweh's name among the Gentiles. He confronts the Jews with the disparity between what they taught as the will of God and their own manner of life. Paul brings the testimony of the Jewish prophets to bear (Isa 52:5 and Ezek. 36:22 in 2:21-23), not to accuse all Jews of being adulterers and thieves, but to effectively undercut any Jewish boast of being a light to the world. Israel's continuing sin and legalistic evasions only confirmed the prophets' charge. Israel was indeed God's people and the law was indeed holy and true. But something had misfired. Israel had failed in its vocation.

The Gentiles of the day at times accused the Jews of atheism (*atheotes*). They had a difficult time with a religion without visual images of worship. The Jews were also accused of being having contempt of their neighbors (*misantropia*) and of not being sociable (*amixia*) because of their separatism. Pagans would later make the same charges of the early Christians.

Jewish attitudes towards the Gentiles compounded these negative perceptions. The Jews of the day were a closed stock, having failed in their responsibility in the Abrahamic Covenant to be a blessing to the world. Jewish privileges at Roman law only made things worse—

- The Jews were allowed to transport the Temple tax to Jerusalem each year, something of an exception to the taxing power of the sovereign Roman state;
- They were, to some extent, allowed to have their courts and live according to their own religious law;
- The Sabbath was respected by Rome even though the Gentiles generally regarded the custom of Sabbath observance as evidence of pure laziness; and

- They enjoyed *astrateia*, an exemption from Roman military service largely because their Sabbath observance rights would make carrying out military duties on the Sabbath an impossibility.

Combine this with Jewish rebelliousness that would erupt into war in 66 AD, one does not have to wonder much about the whys and wherefores of Jewish unpopularity in the first century.

2:25-29—Circumcision of the heart, not the external rite is what matters—Circumcision was the mark of the covenant God made with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation (see Gen. 17). It was the badge of Jewish identity for males. Indeed, the Gentiles were often reviled by Jews as “uncircumcised dogs”. The tragedy was that the Jews depended on this physical mark rather than the spiritual reality it represented (see Deut. 10:16; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:9). God judges in accordance to truth and is not impressed by outward formalities and appearances.

Paul's point is that the badge could be deceptive. If a Jew, who was given the law, broke it, then the badge was worthless. The truth was that a disobedient Jew turned his circumcision into uncircumcision. Jeremiah had said the same thing many centuries before (see Jer. 9:26), charging faithless Israel as being uncircumcised in heart. This outside/inside reversal works in the other direction as well. If the uncircumcised keep the law, then they should be regarded as circumcised. Paul may be thinking of Gentiles who have the law written on their hearts by the Spirit, not because of their special, effective moral effort. The label is irrelevant. What matters is the circumcision of the heart. One is a true Jew, not because of ethnic background or a physical mark, but because of the state of one's heart.

2:25-27—The Law was the major advantage of the Jew and circumcision was a symbol of that advantage. As with the law, the Jews were guilty of placing unwarranted confidence in this outward rite. Circumcision was a symbol of law observance, but if the observance is a mere facade, what value has the symbol? Possessing the symbol without the substance of observance just makes you a lawbreaker like all the others you so piously despise.

2:28-29—Paul continues by demonstrating that a true Jew was one inwardly and true circumcision involved that of the heart as well as outwardly and in physical terms. These verses anticipate the apostle's argument in Romans 8 concerning the inner transformation of the believer by the Spirit. There is abundant Old Testament background for Paul's appeal for the circumcision of the heart (see Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). In 2:29, Paul engages in a word play with the name “Jew”. “Jew” comes from “Judah”, which means “praise”. The Jews praised themselves for their supposed outward conformity to the law. The important thing was not the praise of people, but that of God. Their externalized practice did not garner that praise.

3:1-8—Summation and refutation of objections—Paul engages with an imagined Jewish debater to bring home his argument. Three queries are raised:

- What advantage then has the Jew (3:1-2)? If the law merely heightens the stakes, it seems that the possession of the law is a disadvantage. To the contrary, the law and circumcision was of great value. The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God and the rite symbolic of that. Possession of the Word of God and knowledge of what He wants is a great blessing. The problem is not the law, but Jewish inability (and ours!) to keep it. The issue is that Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant, not that God has been. Being accused of being a sinner was an awful insult in proper Jewish circles. Paul will go on and conclude that everyone is a sinner—a

shocking insult to the primrose set.

- So Jewish unbelief cancels God's faithfulness to His covenant (3:3-4)? Paul says absolutely not, but actually confirms and establishes it. Their lack of faith did not nullify God's faithfulness, but actually underlined it. If some Jews did not have faith, that did not undermine God's faithfulness to the covenant. Paul cites Psalm 51:4 (3:4) where David finally confesses his sin and acknowledges his offense and that God and His standard was right all along. God is true to His covenant promises because He is true to Himself as the arbiter of what is right and good.
- If our faithlessness confirms God's faithfulness, why are we condemned (3:5-8)? The objector asserts that if Jewish unfaithfulness points out God's faithfulness all the more clearly, then why should He punish them for showing off His character? Paul dismisses this argument in that its logic would prevent God from judging the world. The effrontery continues unabated. If Jewish falsehood arrays God's truthfulness in sharp relief and promotes His glory, then why shouldn't the sinner be exempt from condemnation. In essence, this argument would undermine God's sovereignty and reward lawlessness—let us do evil that good may result. Paul dismisses this as unworthy. This is a specious reply, a species of sophistic argument, playing intellectual games rather than seeking the truth.

The Jews are in a special position in relation to God. However, that special position was one of special responsibility as well as special privilege. The Jews were missing that point. However, not all Jews were under condemnation. Paul never forgets the faithful remnant and he was sure that God's seeming rejection was not final. It should have been the Jews evangelizing the Gentiles. Actually, the reverse was to happen.

One can also perceive two universal human tendencies—that the root of all sin is disobedience and that people display an amazing ingenuity in justifying themselves. What is needed is the humility to confess sin in penitence and shame.

C. All fall short (3:9-20)—These verses summarize Paul's argument that all humanity falls short of what God requires. Both Jew and Gentile are under condemnation. Everyone is in the dock. The whole human race is rounded up by the Sovereign Lord and found to be guilty as charged. Paul strings a number of Old Testament references to depict the human condition accurately and faithfully (3:10-18), affirming the universality of sin and asserting its ramifications in every facet of human existence. When human reality is measured by what God requires, there is no place for pride or boasting, only silence that is an implicit admission of guilt. The practical result of seriously considering the requirements of the Law or the “ought” of one's conscience is to become conscious of sin (3:19-20). The best avenues of contemplating humanity apart from Christ only deepens one's sense of failure and of one's need for the gospel.

We are all guilty. No one can obey God's law and be made right by their own doing. It's true that “the doers of the law shall be justified” (2:13), but nobody can do what the law requires. God must save us by another means. Paul concludes this section with our excuses muted, our mouths stopped, guilty as charged in the dock. We must stand silent before Him as sinners in order for Him to work our salvation by His grace. As long as we excuse ourselves, defend ourselves, commend ourselves, we cannot be saved by His grace.

3:10-18—Paul employs a common rabbinical practice called *charaz*, which literally means stringing pearls. He uses quotes from the Psalms (5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; and 140:3) and Isaiah (59:7-8) to

summarize the terrible result of sin upon humanity—

- character mired in ignorance, indifference, crookedness, and uselessness;
- tongues that are destructive, deceitful, and malignant;
- conduct characterized by oppression, injury, and insatiable greed.

No one can claim exemption from this all-encompassing condemnation.

Paul employs a rabbinical practice called *gezerah shavah* which linked Old Testament text by a key word in those texts. All the verses quoted mention body parts: throat, tongue, lips, and mouth (3:13-14, quoting, respectively, Ps. 5:9; 140:3; 10:7); feet (3:15-17, quoting Isa. 59:7-8); and eyes (3:18, quoting Ps. 36:1). The list affirms what theologians describe as total depravity. This does not mean the human beings are as bad as they can be, but rather that their entire beings are adversely affected by sin.

3:19-20—The practical result of dealing seriously with the law is to become conscious of sin. Whenever human achievement is measured against what God requires, there is no place for boasting but only the silence of the guilty. The best revelation of God to the human race apart from Christ only deepens one's awareness of human failure.

III. Justification: The Imputation of Righteousness (3:21-5:21)—Paul moves from a description of justification (3:21-26) to its availability only through faith (3:27-31) to the Old Testament illustration of justification by faith in the cases of Abraham (4:1-5) and David (4:6-8). Then he turns to the promise to Abraham and points out that it came apart from circumcision (4:9-12) and apart from Law (4:13-17). He concludes by asserting that Abraham's faith is the standard for every believer (4:18-25).

This section (3:1-4:25) and the next one (5:1-21) is the biblical heartland for the doctrine of justification by faith. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner to be righteous in Christ on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. It is an act, not a process. It is something that God does, not us. It is a declaration of right standing and being before salvation becomes a process of conforming our lives to be more like Christ. Justification and sanctification are two aspects of our salvation. Justification is a legal declaration and is solely of God. God sees us as being in the right because we are in Christ. Sanctification is a process in which God by His Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ. Sanctification is a co-laboring process. We bring ourselves to the anvil of the Spirit in order for God, by His Spirit, to mold us into shape. That co-laboring, molding process is a lifelong one.

A. Justification Described (3:21-31)—God's method of bringing people into a right relationship with Himself is apart from law. Law operates not to justify but to bring the consciousness of sin. This manner of being rightly related to God operated in the Old Testament long before the Savior appeared, a reality Paul will elaborate on in the next chapter.

Paul uses a term from the law courts—justification (*dikaioisune*). Though we are utterly guilty, yet God, in great mercy, treats us, reckons us, accounts us as if we were innocent. There is sacrifice involved. Jesus Christ, by His life of obedience and His substitutionary death out of love, made one sacrifice to God which truly atoned for human sin. Paul speaks of a deliverance from the slavery of sin. We were held in the power of sin and only Jesus could free us from it.

3:21-24—Unveiling of God's covenant justice—Paul has been building an argument of the covenant

unfaithfulness of the Jewish people. The bearers of the solution of the world's problem turned out to be part of the problem. God had called Abraham (Gen. 12) to undo the problem caused by Adam's sin (Gen. 3) and to get the original creation (Gen. 1-2) back on track. Faced with a world gone wrong, God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Israel) to get things right. However, the covenant people had gone rogue. So there is a two-pronged problem here. God's justice required calling wrong wrong. If wrong is really alright, then we live in a lawless universe, a hell on earth. However, in that judgment, how can God Himself be faithful to His covenant?

Jesus is the faithful Israelite who would offer God the faithful obedience Israel should have offered but failed to do. Foundational to this line of thinking is that Messiah Jesus represents His people, so that what is true of Him is true of them. The result is redemption, a word used for buying back a slave from the slave market, or an object from the pawn shop. This redemption provides what guilty people in the dock could hardly hope for—not just pardon, but a verdict of being “in the right”. But how can God do such a thing? How can He declare guilty people to be in the right, here and now, long before the final day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed?

3:24—The concept of justification is without doubt the leading doctrinal contribution of Romans. The Greek is from the law courts, meaning to “acquit”. However, the term has a more positive side as well, that of considering or declaring someone to be right with God. God not only acquits guilty sinners but declares them to be rightly related to Himself. The background to this declaration is important. God sees the believing sinner as being “in Christ”. Believers do not have a righteousness of their own, but one operative through faith in Christ.

The Old Testament picture pointing to this was the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Two goats were presented at the altar. One was slain and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The priest took the other goat, confessed the sins of the people over it, took it into the wilderness, and set it free to symbolize the carrying away of sin. Psalm 103:12 states: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

3:25-26—**Jesus' death reveals God's covenant justice**—Paul speaks of the “sacrifice of atonement” (*hilasterion*). The wrath of God against sin is satisfactorily met by God's own provision in the sacrifice of His own Son. This propitiation for sin is linked with God's justice. He exercised forbearance in passing over sins previously committed in the ages before Christ's sacrificial death. This was not due to sentimentality but rather to His merciful recognition that justice would be accomplished in due season.

Paul shifts to the language of temple sacrifice. God put forth Jesus, the way a priest would place the shewbread on the altar of the Temple (see Lev. 24:8). Jesus is where, and also the means by which, God of Israel meets with His people and forgives their sins. Forgiveness is effected through the blood of Jesus. His sacrificial death is at the very heart of God's saving plan.

The best way to understand all this is through the picture of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. God accomplishes redemption while being faithful to His age-old covenant plan. God's covenant justice is putting forth Jesus to take upon Himself the anger and wrath of God against sin of which Paul spoke in Romans 1. This justice also declares, in the present, that all those who believe the gospel are in the right. They are the ones who will be vindicated in the future. Thus, in the death of Jesus, God has shown Himself—

- to be in the right in dealing with sin properly and impartially;

- to be faithful to the age-old covenant;
- to have dealt with sin properly and not just fudged the issue;
- to be committed to saving those who call out in sincere but helpless faith.

3:27-31—God of both Jew and Gentile—This flags the end of the way of human achievement. People can never put themselves in a right relationship with God by their effort. All grounds for boasting and smug self-satisfaction are eliminated, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul says this actually strengthens the law, moving the motive for obedience from fear to love. This also opens onto his argument later of a new power to obey—the Holy Spirit within.

God gave Israel Torah, the holy, just, and good law. Israel was required to keep Torah and those who did would be vindicated as God's people when God acted in history to judge the nations. This being marked out as a people in advance, reckoning in the present who would be vindicated in the future, was always understood by the Jews as restricted to the Jews. In addition, it was generally understood as having restrictions within Israel as well—the Pharisees, the Essenes, and other various Jewish groups thought their particular sects would be vindicated and only those in the sects who kept the law properly by the group's estimate would be included in this vindication. Basically, this was the idea of justification by the works of the law and how that played out in Judaism. Paul's word for this mindset was “boasting” and he says that the gospel rules this out.

Paul is touting justification by faith. Anyone who believes the gospel of Jesus is a member of God's covenant family whose sins have been forgiven. They are the ones marked out in advance of the verdict of the last day as being God's people and thus “in the right”. They are the true people of Abraham, the people of Messiah Jesus. The badge of this reality is not some physical mark but faith in Christ Jesus. Jews and Gentiles both come this way and are on an equal footing this way.

In this God does not abolish the law but sets it to a new tune, so to speak. The law was never meant to be fulfilled by works. Indeed, it couldn't be. It was always designed to be fulfilled by faith in Jesus Christ.

B. Illustration of Justification From the Old Testament (4:1-25)—What's with Abraham? Why does Paul suddenly want to talk about Abraham? For basically three reasons—

- Abraham was the founder of the Jewish race and considered to to be a pattern of what an individual should be;
- Abraham embodied the principle Paul was seeking to prove—that what makes us right with God is not the performance of the works of the law (which we can never really do) but the simple trust which takes God at His word and believes what He says. He loves us even though we have done nothing to deserve that love.
- Abraham was the embodiment of what a faith that works looks like. It was not Abraham's meticulous performance of the law that put him in a relationship with God, but his simple trust in God. Abraham didn't have the law. It was given to Moses a number of centuries later. The Jewish rabbis were so infatuated with their theory of works justifying themselves that they insisted that Abraham was chosen because he knew the law by anticipation even though biblical evidence of that was completely absent.

This chapter is a Jewish midrash or commentary on Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was

credited to him as righteousness.” If anyone was righteous by Jewish traditional lore, it was Abraham. Extrabiblical Jewish traditions had Abraham as a model Pharisee long before there were Pharisees. He also was a model proselyte, by tradition bringing many Gentiles to the true God. He was seen as one destroying idols and standing for God's truth. Some Jews believed that Abraham's merit sustained and even rescued Israel in subsequent generations.

1. Case of Abraham and David (4:1-8)—The backbone of Paul's argument is Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed God and that was credited to him as righteousness. He was believing God for a natural heir. God promised him an unbelievable progeny and the old saint took God at His word.

Genesis 15 is the chapter in which God solemnly reiterates His covenant promise to Abraham, a promise of an extraordinary family. What follows is a ceremony, and kind of a weird ceremony at that, that establishes this covenant. How was “being in the right” credited to Abraham? Not by the works of the law, the law had not been given and wouldn't be for several centuries. Not by a physical mark. Abraham only got circumcised in Genesis 17, well over a decade later. No, righteousness was credited to Abraham because he believed God. He started as a pagan, without the law or the sign of the covenant, and came to God by faith, not by any work or badge.

The word “counted” or “credited” is a banking term. The term is used eleven times in Romans 4, translated as “credited” or “reckoned” (4:4, 9-10), “imputed” (4:6, 8, 11, 21-24), as well as “counted”.

4:6-8—This is a head-scratcher. Paul is quoting Psalm 32:1-2 as concerning the reckoning of righteousness apart from works. But the passage quoted speaks of offenses forgiven and of sins covered. David is repenting of his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. In Psalm 32:2, he says: “Blessed is the man whose sin ... is not counted against him.” The Greek word for “credit” (quoting Gen. 15:6 used in 4:3) and “count” (quoting Ps. 32:2 used in 4:8) is the same. Paul is utilizing the Jewish rabbinical practice of *gezerah shavah* or analogy, which links different texts containing the same key word or phrase. This was an interpretative practice that in situations where the same word occurs in two or more passages of Scripture, the sense in one may be carried over to explain the meaning in the other.

What's the upshot? In the case of Abraham, “being in the right” was credited to him by faith, not works. In the case of David, staying in the right (i.e. being forgiven for egregious offense) comes freely by God's grace. Under the law, David had no escape. The penalty for adultery and some degree of homicide was clear—the death of the perpetrator. David was completely dependent on God's mercy. Paul seems to be extrapolating here. Sin in a believer's life does not cancel his or her justification.

2. Promise to Abraham—apart from circumcision (4:9-12)—Paul now addresses the Jewish sign of right relatedness, the mark of the covenant in circumcision. In doing so, he appeals to another Jewish interpretative principle, context. For the Jews, the blessedness that Paul is describing was confined to the circumcised. Paul dissents, pointing out that Abraham was declared righteous by faith fourteen years prior to being circumcised (Gen. 15:6; 16:15-16 to 17:1; 17:24-25). This fact challenged the weight allotted to circumcision in Jewish thinking. Here, Paul is arguing that believing uncircumcised Gentiles can claim Abraham as their father on the simple basis of their common faith. This sign was given after the covenant was established. Abraham's faith, not the physical sign of circumcision, was what God calculated in crediting Abraham as being in the right.

Therefore, circumcision is not an essential to belonging to the covenant family. Abraham is the father of both those circumcised and uncircumcised. This both broadens and narrows the reach of the family. It opens covenant ties to Gentiles who believe in the gospel as well as Jews. It also narrows family. The Jews are not automatically included. The law, circumcision, the Temple rituals and cultic apparatus wasn't the ticket to ride.

That argument here would have punched a good Jew in his religious gut. It's one thing to say that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved if they kept the seven Noahian laws of rabbinical tradition. It was quite another to put Jew and Gentile on the same level as Paul was doing in this passage. The way to God is not through national or racial identity, not through any law or physical mark on someone's body, but by faith which takes God at His word and depends solely on His grace. Abraham was not the father of those who were circumcised, but the father of those who believed God. Real Jews were those who trusted God as Abraham did. Abraham, properly understood, is the father of the faithful.

3. Promise to Abraham—apart from law (4:13-17)—Paul moves on to say that Abraham's reckoning as being in the right was apart from any legal consideration. This is a key idea. The need to keep the law as a condition for receiving the grace of reconciliation would first, pit the God of grace against the impartial God of judgment, and second, it would doom everyone of us, since no one is able to fully keep the law. No, the promise of being credited as being in the right belongs to the realm of faith and grace, not to legal or ritual practice. The covenant and its promises was not made on the basis of circumcision or on the basis of Torah. God's covenantal justice was always intended to put the whole of creation to rights on the basis of faith.

God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and that in and through him all the families of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). That promise came because of the faith he displayed in God. The promise was dependent on two things—God's grace and Abraham's faith. The Jewish attitude of acquiring merit by the works of the law destroyed the basis of the promise for if the promise depends on keeping the law, it can never fulfilled. Indeed, the law actually moves us to desire the very thing it forbids. Stolen fruits are the sweetest. So whenever law is front and center, transgression is not far behind. With transgression comes God's righteous anger for His character is the standard for a moral universe.

4:13—Two Greek words for promise come to the fore. *Huposchesis* means a promise entered into upon conditions. *Epaggelia* is an unconditional promise. God's promise is of the second type. It is dependent on God's own generous heart, not on our merit. In addition, the Hebrew word for “land” also can mean “earth”. Abraham was told that he would inherit the land. This expanded in Jewish thought as expressed here by Paul into the belief that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the whole world to come.

4. Abraham's faith as the standard for every believer (4:18-25)—Abraham's faith becomes the standard for all believers. Here, Paul again goes to the Old Testament to make his argument. Abraham believed God's promise of an heir of his own flesh even though He and Sarah were long past their child-bearing years. Abraham did indeed have a moment of hesitancy with respect to this promise (see Gen. 17:17), but that moment passed and it was not held against him. Indeed, his circumcision and that of his whole household shows his trust in the God of the promise (Gen. 17:23-27). In the end, the old patriarch believed that the Lord God could do the impossible.

Faith is at the heart of Abraham's family. Faith in God who promised to do apparently impossible things and then accomplished them. In Abraham's faith and its subsequent kin, human beings are put back together again and are enabled to discover what a genuinely human life is like. Humans ignored the Creator (1:20, 25); Abraham believed Him (4:17). Humans knew about God's power, but didn't worship Him (1:20). Abraham recognized God's power and trusted Him to use it (4:21). Humans did not give God glory (1:21); Abraham did (4:21). Humans dishonored their own bodies in worshipping false gods (1:24); Abraham worshiped the God who gives life and was given procreative power even though he was long past the age for fathering children.

God reckons as forgiven, with immediate effect, the sins of those who believe in Jesus and are members of the covenant family (3:21-31). Now, akin to the faith of Abraham, God gives us, who believe in Jesus Christ, new life as we recognize that God is God and our lives are in His hands and trust Him to carry this new creation through to its conclusion.

4:23-25—Both Abraham and Sarah were long past the child-bearing years. The promise was not fulfilled by their own activity. God did something special in enabling this old couple, long past their reproductive years, to have a child. These verses apply the lesson to us. Being made right is based on what God has done in Christ and applied by believing in Him. We must believe in the God who acts for us and in so doing we are reckoned as being in the right. We believe in Christ who died for our sins, a forensic reality that is the basis of our justification and of our inauguration into the new humanity in Christ. We are raised to life in Christ, a living relationship with Christ in which we regain and will regain all that was lost in the Fall.

The last verse (4:25) has Isaiah 53 once more in the background. The prophetic promise has come true; Abraham's faith has been vindicated; the law has been fulfilled; human idolatry and sin and death have been decisively dealt with. God sent His son as the Messiah, Israel's faithful representative, to do for Israel and for us what we could not do for ourselves. Those who believe the gospel are assured that they are the people of the new covenant, the world-wide family promised to Abraham.

C. Benefits of justification described (5:1-11)—Can rebellious humanity really have a familiar friendship with God? Our thinking, feeling, and behavior have been so warped by rebellion and idolatry. Surely, establishing a familiar friendship with this perfect Being would be difficult and awkward to maintain. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Paul now draws out the significance of being rightly related to God both for the present earthly life and for the future judgment. It means having peace with God or being reconciled to Him, a secure hope for vindication in the day of judgment.

Through Jesus we have an introduction (*prosagoge*) into the grace which we stand. The word was used for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty. Jesus opens the door to the throne room of the sovereign God and what we find is grace and undeserved kindness, not condemnation, judgment, and vengeance. We have such a glorious hope! By grace, we have—

5:1—Peace with God. On the cross, mercy and truth met, righteousness and peace embraced (see Ps. 85:10). God has declared us as being in the right in Christ and the law cannot condemn us. Moderns think of peace in terms of personal tranquility. Here the idea centers on concord between God and the believer.

5:2a—Access to God in Christ. We have the right of approach to Majesty. When He died, The Temple veil was torn (Lk. 23:45) and the Temple dividing wall broken down (Eph. 2:14). In Christ, believing Jews and Gentiles have access to God (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19-25).

5:2b—Glorious hope. Peace with God takes care of past hostility. Access to God takes care of the present. Hope of the glory of God takes us to our glorious inheritance.

5:3-5—As soon as Paul says these things, he realizes that, in this life, Christians are often up against it. Our sufferings or troubles or tribulations (*thlipsis*) express the pressures of life—material want, difficult circumstances and people, sorrow, in your face persecution, unpopularity, and loneliness. The English word “tribulation” comes from the Latin *tribulum*. This was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it used to thresh grain. It separated the grain from the chaff. Philosophers of Paul's day emphasized that hardships proved the quality of wise people. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition revealed that God tested and matured people by trials. As we go through tribulations, depending on God's grace, the trials purify us, getting rid of our fleshly chaff.

These troubles or sufferings produce a litany of virtues—fortitude, character, hope. In this discussion. Paul employs the rhetorical device called concatenation. We rejoice in the hope of glory, but also in the sufferings that accompany it. Elsewhere, Paul stresses that our sufferings are an extension of the sufferings experienced by Christ in His days in the flesh (Rom. 8:17; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

These sufferings produce an assortment of benefits. First, perseverance, fortitude, or steadfast endurance (*hupomone*). *Hupomone* is more than mere endurance. It is the spirit that overcomes the obstacles before it.

Illustration: Beethoven, when threatened with deafness, the most terrible of troubles for a musician, remarked: “I will take life by the throat.” That is *hupomone*.

This fortitude produces character (*dokime* = tested value). *Dokime* was a word used of metal which has passed through fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. What emerges from the fires of adversity is genuine Christian hope. Hope speaks of character that endures and rises to meet the challenge before it. We don't like crises, but we can appreciate the opportunities crises present. Our hope is in the love of God which is not an illusion. The Spirit within is that love's confirmation. In this litany of terms, Paul underlines that we have access by faith into this grace of God and that faith tested is better than faith.

5:6-11—That Jesus died for us is the final proof of God's love. The wonder of it is that Jesus died for us when we are sinners and in a state of hostility to God. Love can go no further than that. By Jesus' death we are put into a right relationship with God. By His life in the power of the Spirit we are to grow in that relationship. Our status change needs to be accompanied by our change of state.

5:5-8—As we wait for our glorious hope, God pours His love out into our souls. Paul notes how God's love is demonstrated by drawing the stark contrast between the tremendous worth of the life laid down and the utter unworthiness of those who stand to benefit from it. He gave His dearest to rescue the neediest. Four times in three verses the phrase “die for” or “die on behalf of” (*hyper*) is used expressing the substitutionary character of Christ's death. Surrounded by God's love and generosity, we are invited to breathe the fresh air of our regeneration.

We are beloved of God. When we believe in the good news about Jesus we are assured in the present that we belong to the covenant family. Our sins are forgiven and we are already assured of the verdict of being in the right before God when we are in the future dock. In our culture of easy-going relativism, this appears either arrogant or irrelevant. Arrogant because their gauge is a law-side analysis that draws a knowing sneer or irrelevant because a loving God (if He even exists) would never judge anyone. Forget clever answers to these objections. Wallow in the personal love of God which enables us to make such wonderful claims.

5:9-10—We have salvation from future wrath. If God saved us when we were enemies, how much more will He keep on saving us now that we are His children. If God would do this for us when we were in the throes of outright rebellion, will not that same God of grace save us completely. We are saved through His death into His life.

5:11—We have reconciliation with God. Atonement means to be reconciled, to be brought back into progressively familiar friendship. Totally apart from law, and purely by grace, we have a salvation that takes care of the past, the present, and the future. Christ died for us. Christ lives for and in us. Christ is coming again for us. Reconciled when enemies by His death for us, we are saved to the uttermost by His life coarsely through us individually and corporately. We are invited to be true reflections of our Father, the true image bearers we are made to be.

D. Applicability of justification: death in Adam/ life in Christ (5:12-21)—Creation in Adam and the new creation in Christ are compared and elaborated on. This is the standard Jewish argument of *qal vahomer* (how much more). All who were in Adam by birth became sinners; all who are in Christ by the new birth become righteous. However, that new birth introduces a far richer vein than the original birth. We are destined to share in Christ's life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and reign. The inheritance we receive in Christ is far more than the liability we received through Adam.

Adam was given dominion over the old creation, he sinned, and he lost his sovereign domain. Because of Adam's offense, all humankind are under condemnation and under the law of sin and death. Christ came as the sovereign of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By His obedience in going to the cross, He made those who believe right. He not only undid the damage of Adam's sin, but accomplished “much more” by making those who believe the very children of God, destined to be heirs with Him in glory. 1 Corinthians 15:22 succinctly summarizes Paul's argument here: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”. The repeated phrases in this passage ought to be noted. “One” is used eleven times. “reign” or its kin is used five times as is the phrase “much more”.

But it fair for God to condemn all for one man's offense? First of all, let's get off the cloud and talk turkey. Had God tested any of us, the result would have been the same. We all sin in the likeness of Adam's offense. We all set ourselves up as our own little god, going our own way. We all sing a version of “But I Did It My Way”. But Paul pressed beyond this. Humankind is pictured in solidarity with Adam and when Adam sinned, the human race sinned because it was in him. You see the same principle of solidarity used in Hebrews 7:9-10 when Levi is seen as paying a tithe through Abraham to Melchizedek. The important point is this idea of being a representative of humankind. By condemning all through the sinful offense of one, God was able to save all who believe through the faithful sacrifice of one.

5:15-17—Paul's thought is this: By the sin of Adam, all human beings became sinners and were alienated from God. By the righteousness of Jesus Christ, many are restored to a right relationship with God. He restates this idea in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Paul sees Adam as the head of the old humanity. He was one with all humanity and because of this solidarity, his sin was the sin of all. This has occasioned much discussion and a number of suggestions of what the apostle means:

- Some have taken this to just mean that Adam's sin was typical of the sin of all human beings.
- Some have taken this to mean that Adam was the representative of humanity and the human race shares in the deed of its representative. Others push back at this. Asserting that a representative must be chosen by the people he represents and that was not the case with Adam.
- Some say humanity inherits the proclivity to sin from Adam. In Adam, humanity is non posse non peccare (not able not to sin).
- Others assert that what Paul is saying is that all humanity actually sinned in Adam and that death is the direct consequence of this sin.

Note another aspect of Paul's thought. Death is the direct consequence of sin—Adam sinned when he disobeyed a direct command of God and he died. The law did not come until many centuries later in the time of Moses. Can there be sin without the breaking of law? Paul has already made that argument with the Gentiles earlier in Romans, when he noted that people have an internal law of the ought, their conscience. However, he is not making that argument here, but noting that death reigned among people who lived between Adam and Moses. Sin could be counted against them because of humanity's solidarity with Adam.

Critics assert that the argument has a serious flaw. Assuming the literal truth of Adam and Eve, humanity had no choice whatever in the matter. However, our union with Christ is something we accept or reject. It is voluntary, not mandatory. People have wrestled with Paul's argument here throughout the ages. However, the central idea is that of the representative. Adam, the federal head of old humanity acted in a way that affected all. Christ, the federal head of the new humanity acted in a way that affected in a complete way all of the new humanity. By what Christ is, what He did, and what He gives, He enabled people to escape a hopeless situation in which we were totally dominated by sin. Indeed humanity was ruined by sin and rescued by Christ.

The point of solidarity is important because believers have a solidarity with Jesus Christ in His deliverance. If one is tempted to complain of being born with a sinful nature because of Adam and being held accountable for sins resulting from that disability, one is at once swept up into the “much more” of the solidarity with Christ. What is true of Messiah Jesus, in its full scope of death, resurrection, exaltation, and reign, is true of His brethren. The resemblance between Adam and Christ is in this solidarity. Each communicated to those whom he represented that which belonged to him (sin with respect to Adam, being in the right with respect to Christ). What each did involved others.

5:18-19—In this text, Paul gives the full bore comparison of humanity in Adam and humanity in Christ. In Adam, humanity's status is grim. It appears as a death mask of a once noble character, who through a life of folly and dissolution, shows unmistakable signs of decay. In Adam, we are not basically good people who sometimes do bad things. We are flawed people whose flaws repeatedly reveal themselves in specific acts of sin.

Christ's one act of righteousness brought justification for all who are in Him. In Christ, humanity

exhibits life and promise. This new humanity is let loose in the world through the upright life and death of the Lord Jesus. Adam's disobedience involved a grasping after equality with God. In stunning contrast, God's own unique Son, did not grasp for anything, but humbled Himself to the point of accepting death on the cross.

Does the sweeping language used here suggest that all humanity will be brought within the circle of justification? Does it suggest that no one will be lost? No. Paul isn't contradicting himself, for he has already presented people as perishing because of sin (see 2:12). His entire presentation of salvation has emphasized that justification is granted only on the basis of faith. The upshot is clear. Only insofar as “the many” are found in Christ can they qualify as being found in the right.

5:20-21—These verses are really an extension of his thought in Romans 3:20, that through the law we become conscious of sin. Paul is saying that only when sin is seen in its maximum and true expression can we truly appreciate the extent of divine grace. The law is indeed a revelation of God's will and also serves to restrain evil in the world, but it is not the beginning of the new humanity. When Torah arrived in Israel, far from marking the start of the new humanity, it intensified the problem of the old humanity. The law draws attention to sin and what is sin, but by itself is powerless to do anything about it. God has found a new way to deal with this inability of the law, which Paul will elaborate on in 8:1-11 and 10:5-9.

Another contrast comes in 5:21. “Sin reigned in death” pictures an abstract power taking hold of the world. Its tyrannical rule destroys the world bit by bit until the whole place is laid to waste. This contrasts with the reign of grace, energetic and full of new possibilities. This has been accomplished through God's faithful covenant justice. A new type of human existence has been brought about because the living God has been faithful to His covenant, which is designed to put the world to its rights. The death of Jesus put into action God's redemptive love (5:8) and was an act of faithful obedience through which, as always envisioned by the covenant, sin and death were defeated and grace and life unveiled in their wake.

IV. Sanctification: Imparting Righteousness (6:1-8:39)—How we are set apart to God—Paul has been discussing why we need salvation, what God has done to bring it about, and how we can get on board with God's program and purpose. He has spoken of sin, condemnation, and of Christ's work, faith, and justification (making us right). But we are still living in a fallen world and have an old master to contend with who desires to deceive us and enslave us all over again. What divine resources help us to contend with sin as we live our lives in Christ?

That is the subject of the next three chapters. This involves regeneration, the point where justification takes place. That is God's declaration that the believer has the status of being right in Christ. However, God is after our actual state or condition and not just our status. That reforming process is described as sanctification and begins with the reality of that word's meaning – our being set apart in Christ and His Spirit. This positional sanctification is basic to any progress in the Christian life. This process of sanctification reaches its consummation when we experience complete sanctification, leaving our sinful natures behind and being fully conformed to the divine standard seen in the life of God's unique Son (8:29-30). We believe that that occurs at death (see Heb. 12:23) or at the return of Christ for those alive at that time (1 Jn. 3:2).

Let's say the same thing in another way. Romans 6 describes how Christians come through the water of

baptism (like the Red Sea in Exodus) and thus leave behind slavery to sin (like Egypt in the Exodus) and enter unto a new life's journey (like leaving Egypt and going to the Promised Land). Romans 7 will wrestle with the question what happened at Mount Sinai and the problematic aftermath which led to a strange new fulfillment of the law. Romans 8 describes the Christian life in terms of God leading His people home to their inheritance. Romans 6-8 is saying that this is what God was really promising to Abraham and this is how that covenant promise is being and will be fulfilled. What God has done in the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah Jesus is the true fulfillment of the covenant given to and through Abraham.

But what of the objection to God's free grace in justification? Why live up if the verdict is already in? Paul's answer is that in becoming a Christian one moves from one type of humanity (in Adam) to another type (in Christ). In becoming a Christian you die and rise again in Messiah Jesus. Since the Messiah represents His people, all that is true of Messiah is true of His people. This is pictured in the rite of baptism. Thus, there is a change in our status which requires our recognition of that and for us to take actual steps in bringing your life into line with the personal stand on the Resurrection ground on which you stand.

In Romans 6 through 8, Paul raises and answers three basic objections to justification by faith:

- If God's grace abounds when we sin, then let's continue sinning so we can experience more grace (6:1-14);
- If we are no longer under the law, then we are free to live any way we want (6:15-7:6);
- If your contentions are correct, then God's law is sinful (7:7-25).

These objections miss the point, going in the extremes of either legalism or license. In answering them, Paul explains how we can live lives of victory (Rom. 6), liberty (Rom. 7), and experience security (Rom. 8). He explains our relationship to the flesh, the law, and the Holy Spirit.

A. Believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection life (6:1-23)—Romans 6 is a bracing chapter. It gives us the framework for thinking about why Christian behavior matters, and how to put it into practice. The Lord's redeeming work is not only substitutionary, but also representative. Christians are viewed as identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. In this identification, we are delivered from any claim of sin to control us. God has a plan for dealing with the power of sin as well as its guilt and they both entail our solidarity with the Lord Jesus. This chapter in a nutshell:

- Know the truth of your new identity in Christ;
- Consider/reckon/count it to be true in your daily life;
- Yield/present/offer yourself to God.

The question Paul is pressing goes to the heart of the spiritual battle. Why be enslaved to the rotten leeks and garlic of your Egypts of which you were ashamed. The power of sin has been broken and the life of the Spirit cascades within. Mortify the flesh in the energy of the Spirit by knowing that you have died to sin, reckoning that in the particulars of your life, and presenting yourself and yielding to the Spirit's control.

1. Know—what we need to know to live right (6:1-10)—The repetition of the word “know” (6:3, 6, 9) underlines that we need to process something to live as we should. The truth Paul is teaching is the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Just as we are

identified with Adam in his sin and condemnation, we are now identified with Christ in His righteousness and justification.

There are two types of humanity—those in Adam and those in Messiah Jesus. Once you have died with Christ, sin no longer has a claim on you. When we are in the Lord Jesus, what is true of Him is true of us. In addition, the future has come forward into the present in the person and achievement of Jesus, so that His followers already taste the reality of that future verdict in the dock while living in the present. We must know this. The talk and thought must be processed for the walk to truly begin.

Note how his argument develops:

Justification (3:21-5:21)

—Substitution—He died for me

—He died for my sin

—He paid sin's penalty

—Righteousness imputed to my credit

Sanctification (6:1-8:39)

—Identification—I died with Him

—He died unto sin

—He broke sin's power

—Righteousness imparted to my life

We are in Christ. He is our representative head. What happened to Him, happens to us. This living union with Christ introduces a whole new dynamic to our lives.

6:2-5—Paul uses the early church's experience of baptism (usually by immersion) as symbolic of dying, being buried under the waters, and rising again to new life. The baptismal practice of early Christians was closely connected with professions of faith. This new life is based on our identification, our union with Christ. We are no longer the old humanity in Adam, we are the new humanity in Christ.

This baptism is an outward symbol of an inward experience. The Spirit baptizes us into one body (1 Cor. 12:13) immediately upon our conversion. Our experience of water baptism is a step of obedience and a picture of the new inner reality of being in Christ. A good illustration of that sequence is what happened to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10:34-48. Romans 6:4 teaches that we share in Christ's resurrection power now and Romans 6:5 assures us of our future bodily resurrection when we die. We need to set our hearts on things above. We have died with Him and now live in Him (Col. 3:1, 3).

6:6-10—We should not serve sin. Sin is a terrible master and finds a willing servant in our human flesh. The body is not sinful per se, but our sin nature allows sin a beachhead in our being (see Rom. 7:18). Knowing that we have died with Christ means that the body need not obey its old master Sin. Paul is describing a fact which we need to act on. Sin and death have no dominion over Christ. We are in Christ and therefore sin and death have no dominion over us. Christ died for sin and unto sin. He not only paid the penalty for it but also broke its power. But how do we make this fact a part of our life experience?

Jewish teachers believed that what they called the “evil impulse” would trouble even the most pious person until the time of Messiah, when the evil impulse would be finally slain. For Paul, Messiah has come, and sin's power has been broken. The finished work of Christ means that the believer has already died to sin and now needs to acknowledge this.

2. Consider/count/reckon—moving out on what we know (6:11)—“Reckon” translates a word used over 40 times in the New Testament. Almost half of those occurrences appear in Romans. It first

appears in Romans 4. It can be translated “count”, “credited”, “reckon”, or “impute”. We are to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ. What God says in His Word about what happened at our conversion is now the experience we act on.

Reckoning doesn't create our union with Christ, but makes it operative in our lives. This reckoning is in the present tense, an ongoing activity. Christians are dead and alive at the same time—dead to sin and self, but alive to God in the power of the Spirit. But is this just an attempt to convince yourself of something totally unrealistic in terms of actual experience? There must be faith and willing cooperation. Believers must refuse to be cowed by sin and refuse obedience to its enticements. Rather we are to present or offer ourselves to God and our capacities as instruments of righteousness.

“Reckon” was a bookkeeping term, used in calculating accounts, in working out profit and loss figures. In this reckoning we are remembering who we really are, so that we can act accordingly. Don't listen to those voices that tell you you are still in Adam and should behave just like you used to. Resisting temptation is not a matter of pretending you wouldn't find it easier to give in. It's a matter of thinking straight and acting on what you know to be true.

3. Present/yield/offer (6:12-14)—We are to serve a new master. “Present/yield/offer” is used five times in this text (in 6:13, 16, and 19). It means to place at one's disposal, to present, to offer as a sacrifice. We are to yield ourselves to God by His Spirit. This is an act of the will based on the knowledge of what Christ has done for us and the deep desire that the freedom He won for us will be our actual measure.

4. An exchange of masters (6:15-23)—Paul is countering a common argument against salvation by grace. If God yearns to forgive us and His grace is sufficient to cover every stain and spot of sin, then why worry about sin? Why not just do what we like. Paul's argument in reply is to say that we have exchanged masters. The old tyrant of sin that led us to increasing bondage to our shame has been replaced by Christ, our new master. We were slaves to sin. Sin had us in exclusive bondage. Now God has exclusive possession of you. The old humanity tended to lawlessness; it couldn't obey the law. Indeed, the law egged the old nature on to increasing lawlessness. Our exclusive possession by God leads to sanctification (*hagiasmos*), the road to holiness. It is a lifelong process.

We yield or offer ourselves to God by His Spirit out of gratitude for God's gracious kindness (6:14-15) and because we want our freedom (6:16-20). Whatever you yield to becomes your master. If we yield our members to sin, the old tyrant is back. To yield to sin only leads us deeper into sin's pigpen. It becomes more and more difficult to do what we know is right. The story of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-24) illustrates this. First, he was a slave of wrong desires, then of wrong deeds, and finally a literal slave taking care of pigs.

Paul is arguing that with new freedoms, one gets new frameworks. The purpose of the new life, and the reason standards of behavior are necessary, is because God is putting the world to rights and wants His newborn children to be part of that work. Christians are to be people transformed from within and willing to conform to the teaching to which they committed. The early Christians developed certain basic traditions about the gospel itself (1 Cor. 15:3-8), about the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:23-26), about behavior (1 Thess. 4:1) and about several other things as well. These rules set out frameworks of belief and behavior, a family code of conduct. They were to be willing bond-servants of Jesus Christ and comport themselves in a way that honored His name.

Illustration—Luther when tempted crying out “I have been baptized!” This was his way of saying that he had a new master.

The objection that we are merely exchanging one bondage for another doesn't hold up. Sin's bondage is rigorous, relentless, and destructive. Its ways carry the reality and odor of death. Our new bondage leads to life and peace. Besides, we have no alternative. We either learn to live by the Spirit or return to the mire.

6:20-23—These rules and guidelines for Christian living are not there to squash us whether or not it is good for us. The rules are there because they are the rules of the road. It matters which road you take. To choose to live in sinful ways, you are choosing behavior that is destructive to those doing it and others around it. It already has the smell of death upon it. When people behave in patterns set out in the gospel and early Christian teaching, there are signs of life already at work. Christians were summoned to live in the present in light of their future destination.

B. Believer and the law (7:1-25)—Paul's thought progresses. How do we deal with the flesh is the subject of Romans 6. That chapter explained that the believer's crucifixion with Christ has brought freedom from enslavement to sin. Now, he considers the Christian and the law. The law had served to promote sin. Paul's argument now turns to show that Christ's death effected release of believers from the law as well. Emancipation from law permits a new attachment, namely to the risen Lord in the power of His Spirit.

The main subject of Romans 7 is not the Christian life per se, but the law. Paul wants to explain what the law was given for, how, in a strange sense, it did the work God designed it for, and that the law is now fulfilled through the work of Messiah Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He also wants to explain that the law itself could not give the life it promised, but was bound to work against that very life. The gospel has made a transition from the covenant family defined by the law to the covenant family defined by the Messiah and the Spirit.

Two extremes raise their heads. License argues that since we are saved by grace, then we are free to live as we please. Legalism argues that yes, we are saved by grace, but we must live to please God by obeying His law. Paul answers the first group in Romans 6 and the second group in Romans 7. Learning to know, reckon, and yield, we begin to have some victory over the habits of our flesh. But then we begin to see deeper into our own hearts and discover how deeply sinful we are. God's law takes on new power and we begin to wonder if we can ever do good. We begin to see past plural sins to the singular sin problem within. Trying to please God legalistically, often leads us to being a pretender or abandoning the pursuit of being made right altogether. In addition, a legalistic emphasis often makes people judgmental and very hard on other people.

1. Deliverance from law (7:1-6)—This passage continues the discussion of Romans 6:15—“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” The basis of Paul's argument here is the legal principle that death cancels all contracts. In 6:15-18, Paul used the illustration of master and servant. Here he uses the illustration of marriage.

A marriage relationship is broken by death and the living married partner is free to marry again. Just as a widow or widower is freed from the obligations of her or his marriage, so too the believer is freed

from the obligations of the law that can never be kept. In our new allegiance, to Christ rather than to sin, our obedience is not to an externally imposed written code but to an inner allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

7:4-6—When we trusted Christ, we died to the law, arose from the dead, and are now free to live a new kind of life. While we died to the law, we are not lawless but living by a new principle within, God's Spirit which Paul will elaborate on in Romans 8. Paul then arrives at his conclusion: the law cannot exercise authority over a dead person. We are delivered from law in order that we might serve Christ. How is this different than what went on before? The law did not provide the ability to obey it. The Spirit enables us to live for Christ.

Paul is saying that the law appears to be part of what is amiss. It is part and parcel of the Adamic dilemma. It does not lift us out of the sin mess, it simply informs us that we're in the mess. Living in the old Adamic solidarity, and being under the law, means living the old life under the letter of law. Living the new life in solidarity with Messiah and His Spirit means leaving behind every aspect of life in Adam and being energized by the Spirit.

2. Law and sin: what's the gig? (7:7-25)—The law cannot be identified as sinful simply because it provides an awareness of sin. Paul sharpens this point by the specific example of the tenth commandment “Do not covet”. He appeals to his own experience (7:7-13) and then broadens that out to a more general picture of the soul struggle of those who try to serve God by obeying the law but find themselves checkmated of the operation of sin within (7:14-25). Sin, in this passage is not a reference to specific acts of sin, but to the sin principle, activated in a person's life by the law's prohibition.

7:7-13—Paul is contending that the law is God's law and it is holy, just, and good. It very effectively identifies sin but in so doing doesn't supply the power to overcome it. Indeed, it frequently becomes the occasion of temptation in accomplishing its function. It's as if sin uses the law, lying in wait and taking advantage of the law.

Paul deals with the paradox of the law and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The law is holy and good and yet it actually fosters sin in that it defines it and actually encourages it. Forbidden things hold a fascination for people. Sin's delusion works in three way:

- It deludes us regarding the satisfaction to be found in sin;
- It deludes us regarding the excuses that can be made for it; and
- It deludes us regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it.

Thomas Carlyle spoke of the infinite damnability of sin. It takes the loveliest of things and corrupts them with its polluting touch. It takes love and turns it to lust. It turns the beauty of friendship and uses it as seduction to wrong things. It takes honorable desires and turns them into hateful obsessions.

Paul was reared and lived as a strict Pharisee. However, there was a time where he was blissfully indifferent to the intensely and inwardly searching demands that law makes on an individual. External compliance was unaccompanied by searching queries of the inner self. He speaks of sin as personified, as acting as a person would act. It uses and twists the law to its own ends. Sin within actually caused him to do or want to do that very thing the law forbade. The law seemed an accomplice to sin within, providing the occasion for failure.

7:14-25—Human situation—Paul bares his soul and the souls of us all. We know what is right and want to do what is right, but somehow we just don't do it consistently. Seneca described our human “helplessness in necessary things”. The Roman poet Ovid once said: “I see better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse.”

The Jewish rabbis taught that there was a good impulse and an evil impulse in all of us. They also said that no one ever need succumb to the evil impulse. The law was the antiseptic to the evil impulse. Paul couldn't disagree more. The law actually egged on the evil impulse. There is something in us that responds to the seduction of sin.

This passage demonstrates a number of human inadequacies:

- Human knowledge—We may know how we ought to behave in a given situation, but that is far from being able to behave appropriately.
- Human resolution—To resolve to do a thing is far from actually doing it. There is in human nature an essential weakness of will.
- Diagnosis—We may know what is wrong, but that in itself does not give us the strength to do what is right.

7:14-20—This is a classic passage on our struggle with sin. People from time in memorial have noted the irony of knowing the right thing to do, but not only not doing the right thing but very thing they know is wrong. Paul describes the law as spiritual, but he is unspiritual, fleshly and in rebellion against God and indeed against anything that would hold him to a standard. He moves on then to describe himself as sold as a slave to sin. This slavery extends to the totality of his being. He doesn't understand himself and his moral incapacity. He wants to do what is right, but doesn't do it. The power of sin within drives him to do what is wrong or long to do it. The invader he fears has secured more than a foothold, but roams freely, making itself at home and thrusting its waywardness ever more deeply into his desires and longings. The person who wants to do good for the right reasons, finds himself or herself checkmated from within.

Paul is describing indwelling sin in this passage (7:14, 18, 20). Deliverance is not in will power or rules or pretense. The dilemma Paul describes in this passage indicates that a person's mind, will, and body can be controlled by the flesh or by the Spirit. Why surrender to the old tyrant? The struggle within shows the new believer that he cannot do the good he wants to do but has the inclinations (even aroused inclinations) to do the evil he detests. Romans 6 spoke of how to stop doing bad things—know, reckon, yield). Romans 7 speaks of how we will ever do anything good again.

Romans 7 is a longer version of Romans 2:17-24; Romans 8 of 2:28-29; Romans 9 of Romans 3. (Some commentators speak of the symphonic structure of the letter). The point of 2:17-24 was that Israel, though claiming to be better off before God, knew the right thing to do, but was not be able to do it. God's chosen people were no better off for possessing the law. They ended up, like everyone else, in a state of moral incapability.

7:21-25—Paul describes his inner conflict. In his inner being, the law is welcome and brings delight. But in his members and his way of living, he finds the sin principle that even uses the law and Paul's best intentions to its dastardly ends. There is an inner state of war. The closer you try to walk according to the law, the more the law accuses you of being a sinner.

When God gave Torah His intention was not simply to teach the world a standard of morality. It was to further His purpose for Israel to be an instrument to rescue the world from sin and death. To accomplish this, God not only gave Torah but also His Son and His Spirit to do at last what Torah could not do in and of itself.

Questions about this passage abound. Is this Paul's personal experience or is the passage a vehicle to present the struggle with sin as an universal experience. Is the "I" in this text truly autobiographical or does it function as a hook for the broader and more universal human dilemma? Then again, perhaps this isn't and either/or but a little of both.

The more strenuously debated issue is whether the state described in the passage is that of an unsaved person or a believer. Arguments that it is describing the situation of an unsaved person usually proceed along the following lines:

- It was the prevailing view of the early church;
- Expressions like "sold as a slave to sin" and "unspiritual" seem a more fitting description of someone outside of Christ than one in Christ;
- "Now" in 8:1 seems to be a transition from an unsaved to a saved condition;
- The absence of the Holy Spirit and Christ from the description of the struggle seems to indicate the unsaved are in view.

Arguments that believers are in view in this passage are as follows:

- Augustine and Reformers were of this opinion;
- The change from the past tense in 7:7-13 to the present tense in 7:14-25 seems to suggest a movement from a pre-Christian experience to one post conversion;
- The movement of the book is toward sanctification, uniquely issues only for believers; This type of conflict is also seen in other Pauline passages (see Gal. 5:17);
- The power of self-diagnosis into the inner bowels of our waywardness is beyond the capacity of an unbeliever;
- The person described is desiring holiness in a way that is difficult to picture in one unsaved.

7:23-25—The philosophers of the day often spoke of this struggle knowing the right thing and not being able to do it in military terms as Paul does in 7:23. "Wretched man that I am" in 7:24 was a cry of despair, mourning, or self-reproach. Some philosophers commented that this was their state—a mind morally attuned but imprisoned in a wayward body. Paul aptly describes the dual allegiance—trying to keep the law while enslaved by sinful passions.

C. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)—This is high and holy ground. It begins with instruction, moves to consolation, and culminates in celebration. It gathers together the various strands of thought in the preceding chapters. Like Romans 5, it presents the blessings of justification grounded in the removal of condemnation. Like Romans 6, it stresses freedom from the bondage of sin and ultimately from that of death itself. Like Romans 7, it deals with the problem of the flesh, finding the remedy in the liberating and productive ministry of the Spirit.

There is no condemnation because we share the righteousness of Christ and the law cannot condemn us (8:1-4). There is no obligation we cannot meet because we have the Spirit of God who enables us to overcome the flesh and live for God (8:5-17). There is no frustration and despair even in the midst of suffering and pain because we share in the very glory of the Lord Jesus Himself and that hope is a glorious one (8:18-30). There is no separation and abandonment to fear because of the deep love of God in Christ Jesus (8:31-39).

Two words keep recurring in this chapter—flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*). Paul seems to use *sarx* in three different ways:

- Literally, of our physicality. He speaks of circumcision “in the flesh” in Romans 2:28.
- He speaks of things being “according to the flesh” (*kara sarka*). When he uses this phrase, he is looking at things from the human point of view.
- He has his own way of using “flesh”, meaning human nature in all its weakness. When he speaks of being “in the flesh” (*en sarki*) (7:5), of walking according to the flesh (8:4, 5), of being in the flesh (8:8), of the mind of the flesh (8:6, 8), of not being in the flesh (8:9), he is speaking of our fallen nature.

Spirit (*pneuma*) usually speaks of a power that is not our own, but is divine. It is used some twenty times in this chapter. Believers, who were in Adam and not able not to sin, are now in Christ and able not to sin because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul is not saying we won't sin, but that a new power and a new obligation enables us to live lives pleasing to God.

1. Liberation from the law of sin and death (8:1-11)—Paul contrasts life in two spheres of existence—in Adamic flesh and in Christ and the power of the Spirit. Flesh (sinful nature in the NIV) connotes both physical weakness and mortality as well as moral weakness. A life ruled by the flesh is a life dependent on finite human effort and resources, a self-focused life as opposed to one directed by God's Spirit. Romans 7:14-25 describes the struggle of trying to fulfill divine morality by human effort. This text tells us that people either live that struggle by the flesh or accept God's gift of being made right by the Spirit. The flesh is mortal and inadequate to stand against sin. The problem with the flesh is not that people are physical but that they live life their own way (I did it my way) instead of by God's power and grace.

8:1-4—Romans 3:20 reveals the “therefore” of condemnation in Adam. Romans 8:1 reveals the “therefore” of no condemnation in Christ. Here we see that the intention of the law (to give life) is finally and gloriously achieved when by the Spirit, God gives resurrection life to all those who belong to Messiah Jesus. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus—

- because the Spirit has set you free from law that occasioned sin; and
- because God acted in His Son and His Spirit to condemn sin and provide life; and
- because there are two types of humanity and those in Christ Jesus are the Spirit-type; and
- because the two types of humanity are heading, respectively, for death and life.

Sin has been executed in the person of Messiah. The weight of the world's sin weighed on Israel. The weight of Israel's sin weighed on Messiah and Messiah died a criminal's death as God condemned sin.

8:3-4—The law (back to the Mosaic law) makes demands and condemns when those demands are not met. The problem is not the law itself but the inability of the recipients of that law to keep it. Christ's

mission comes into view. He came in the “likeness of sinful man” carefully articulating what theologians call the hypostatic union (the union of humanity and divinity in a single person, Jesus). He came in the likeness of sinful man but was not Himself sinful. In addition, that likeness was truly human, not some subtle docetic idea that denies the true humanity of the Lord Jesus. Jesus dealt with sin effectively and representatively, making it possible for His followers to live the kind of life envisioned in this text. God condemned sin in the same sort of human nature that, in everyone else, is dominated by sin.

Paul does not present believers as robots, but persons accountable for their redeemed lives. We are to live as people of this new humanity. At the same time, he pictures the requirements of the law as fulfilled (passively) in believers, not actively by them. We do not independently possess the power to live the life envisioned. The power to live as we should resides in the Spirit.

8:5-11—Paul gives us an extended statement contrasting life according to the sinful nature and life according to the Spirit. Paul describes two kind of life that are diametrically opposed to one another. He exposes the flesh in its stark reality as totally alien to God and His purposes. Life dominated by the sinful nature focuses on self and its own desires. It may be controlled by passions and lusts, or pride, or ambition, but it is all about self. Life dominated by the Spirit of God is all about Christ. He is the person's mind, his controlling principle and affection, and his focus for living. This Christ-centered life is not a perfect one. However, it is a life of steady progress to God. Paul's thought is that every Christian is indissolubly one with Christ. We are in Christ and share with Him complete identity from cross to throne. We are crucified, raised, exalted, and enthroned with Him.

He contrasts the carnal mind with the spiritual mind—

- **Flesh vs Spirit (8:5)**—Those outside Christ live according to the flesh, those in Christ according to the Spirit. This is not claiming that those outside Christ never do anything “good” and that those in Christ don't do anything “bad”. Paul is speaking of the bent of the old nature and the bent of the new nature. Flesh refers to people or things who share the corruptibility and mortality of the world and often are in rebellion along with the world. Spirit refers to God's Spirit remaking and reclaiming us.
- **Death vs life (8:6)**—Outside of Christ, people are alive physically and dead spiritually.
- **War with God vs peace with God (8:6-7)**—There is an enmity toward God and His requirements among the unsaved that is removed with saving faith.
- **Pleasing self vs. pleasing God (8:8)**—“I did it my way” is not a song of victory in the end, but a lament of enslavement. The root of sin is self-sovereignty—“I will” rather than “Thy will”.

The evidence of conversion is the presence of the Spirit within (8:9). He witnesses to us that we are children of God (8:16), that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20), that we are sealed with a new owner (Eph. 1:13-14). Such a life beckons us to an abundant life. In our “proper” moments, our “better” moments, we yearn for it.

How can God declare in the present that those who believe the gospel are in the right, anticipating the verdict of the final judgment? The Spirit works in the hearts of believers, generating faith with the preaching of the gospel and then generates the kind of life that lives in covenant faithfulness.

2. Additional ministries of the Spirit—groaning (8:12-27)—Paul speaks of three groanings as we live our lives in Christ in this order.

- 8:18-22—Creation groans—Creation was described as good (Gen. 1:31), but now it groans, being subjected to frustration and to a decay it cannot of itself escape. It awaits its liberation from these things which happens to correspond to the unveiling of our full inheritance as God's children and heirs.
- 8:23-25—Believers groan—With our new creation in Christ, we get a foretaste of glory. We get a foretaste of the blessings of heaven in the life of the Spirit, We begin to understand and eagerly await our full inheritance that our redemption promises. Meanwhile, we wait hopefully. When we experience pain and suffering, when we are frustrated by our circumstances, when we are confused by the trials that seem to press in on us from every side, we realize that these things are indeed temporary and prepare us (even unknowingly) for the weight of glory that awaits us as children of God.
- 8:25-27—Spirit groans—God is indeed concerned for the trials of His people. The Spirit groans with us and feels the burden of our weaknesses and suffering. He prays for us in this groaning so that we might be led into God's will.

a. Children of God led by the Spirit (8:12-17)—We are called to a life of saying “No” to all kinds of things that the world and our flesh say we want. A Christian discovers a new identity by adoption into God's covenant family. When the Spirit dwells within us, one of the first signs is we recognize God as father. The Spirit speaks to our spirits and we must learn to listen to His voice, to nurture this faculty of listening. This passage concludes with lifting our eyes to our destiny—we will share the every destiny of glory of the Lord Himself. We will be heirs with Him in glory. We need to live in a particular way, a way which anticipates this “glory”, this rule over all creation in which we will eventually share with the Messiah. That, in the present will mean some degree of suffering as indeed He did.

8:12-13—The ministry described here is mortification, putting the sin nature to death. If this seems like 6:11-14 all over again, it's because it is with the reminder that no one can hope to deal with the sinful nature effectively by determination alone. “Obligation” is the keynote here. We are debtors to the Spirit and must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are obligated to live and serve God in the arena of the Spirit. The passage clearly implies that believers still wrestle with the sinful nature within despite having been crucified with Christ and underlines that sanctification (growth in the grace of God) is not a luxury but a necessity. The solicitations of the flesh are constant and must be continually put to death.

8:14-17—What is set forth in these verses is the Spirit's attestation that we are indeed children of God and adopted into the heavenly family. It assures us of our relationship based not on our progress or lack thereof in the Christian life but by redirecting our vision to the Father who established the relationship. This attestation is essential to mortification because who would successfully crucify the flesh must be assured that they have been claimed by God and equipped with His resources for the fight. The Spirit's role is a shepherding one. He persuades and does not coerce.

Adoption at Roman law had two steps—*mancipatio*, carried out by a symbolic sale and *vindicatio*, where the adopting parent went to a Roman magistrate and presented the legal case for the transfer of family ties. The adopted persons lost all rights in their old families and gained all legitimate rights in their new ones. They became heirs in their new parents' estate and co-heirs with naturally born children. The adoptive emperors of the second century—Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, and Marcus Aurelius illustrate this point. Paul is saying that the old life has no more rights over us. God has purchased those rights. The past is canceled and our debts and sins wiped clean. We begin a new life in Christ and become joint heirs to all His riches.

b. Creation's renewal patiently awaited (8:18-25)—God's covenant faithfulness was always about His commitment to put the world to rights. Humanity was originally placed in charge of creation but rebelled and in various ways worshiped the creation itself rather than God. Creation fell into disrepair. God allowed this to continue while Israel failed in its task until a faithful Israelite, Messiah Jesus, shouldered for all the penalty for sin and in His train brings those who believe back to take their place under God over all creation. Creation will benefit wonderfully when God's children are glorified. Creation is in labor longing for God's new world to be born. We are groaning and waiting, eager but patient.

8:18-22—Paul lingers with this idea of future glory in relation to present suffering. Paul speaks of this age and the glory that will be disclosed. This vision of a renewed earth was dear to the Jews and should be dear to us. Paul was realistic in seeing the extent of human sin and the sorry state of the world. But he also saw God's redeeming power. Life is not to be a state of despair, waiting for an inevitable end of a world encompassed by sin, death, and decay. Our new life is one of eager anticipation of a liberation, a renewal, and a recreation brought about by the glory and power of God. The Christian keynote is hope—we do not only see the consequences of human sin, but we see the power of God's mercy and grace.

This is akin to his reflection in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. Weighed in the scales of lasting values, the hardships endured in this life are light compared to the splendor of the life to come. He expands this concept beyond the believer's individual destiny to all of creation. Creation is personified as longing for our glorification which will bring deliverance from the frustration imposed on it by human sin, the bondage to decay.

Cosmic pessimism was rampant in the first century. Greek tradition saw the world declining from a past golden age. Jewish tradition suggested that Adam's sin had brought extensive harm and the domination of evil powers to all creation. Many believed that decay and a melancholy fate reigned supreme. Paul's point that God had subjected creation to this worthless temporal state is bearable only in the light of future hope made sure by God's faithfulness.

8:23-25—Creation's groaning for our full revelation as the children of God is accompanied by our own groaning for that glorious destiny. We who have the first-fruits of the Spirit also groan inwardly for the redemption of our bodies.

This expression of the “first-fruits” looks back to the Old Testament where the Israelites were expected to bring the first ripened grain to the Lord as an offering (see Ex. 23:19; Neh. 10:35), recognizing that the harvest was His. Implicit in this ritual was the divine assurance that the general harvest to be enjoyed by those offering the grain offering would providentially follow. Applied to the discussion at hand, the gift of the Spirit to believers at the inception of the new life in Christ to be understood as God's pledge of the completion of the process of salvation. That is stated here as “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Believers who are already adopted and sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption (see Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30) will receive a final adoption, when we will be fully conformed to the likeness of God's Son (8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2). In between these two events stretches the course of our sanctification. Herein lies our blessed hope for which we are to patiently wait.

c. Spirit's intercession for us (8:26-27)—Paul now arrives at the final ministry of the Spirit mentioned in this passage, His work of intercession. The Spirit intercedes for us in our weakness. We often do not know our real needs nor the needs of others. In addition, we are often in the dark

concerning God's will respecting these things and many other things. The Spirit searches us and intercedes for us in accordance with the divine will. That is such a comforting thought when our situations and the general world condition leave us speechless and seemingly without direction.

God, by His Spirit, is the searcher of hearts. No doubt as He searches the dark corridors of our hearts He comes across all sorts of things we would rather remain hidden. However, the one thing He yearns to find is us is the sound of the spirit's groaning. The Spirit calls out to us with a groaning beyond words, a prayer beyond prayer, diving down deep into the cold and dark depths of our humanity. We discover that the transcendent creator is continually in communion with the Spirit who dwells in the hearts of His people. God hears and answers prayer which we only know as groaning, the tossing and turning of unquiet hearts standing before our Maker with the puzzles and pain of the world heavy on our hearts. We are to be caught up in the loving, groaning, redeeming dialogue between the Father and the Spirit. This is often what worshiping the true God looks like while the world remains out of joint. Prayer, as described in 8:26-27 is taking responsibility for the larger world, in advance of the new creation, and entering into and sharing the sufferings of Messiah as we do so. We are thus marked out as God's people, not with outward markings, but in the secret prayers and loves and longings of our souls. We follow in the Son's resurrection, exaltation, and reign, chosen of God in a mystery Paul states but doesn't attempt to explain.

3. Security and permanence of life in the Spirit (8:28-39)—This passage spells out God's provision for His own. It reaches back into the past to include His eternal purpose and its realization in the love and sacrifice of Christ. It moves to the present to proclaim God's power to preserve His own. It sweeps ahead to defy any power to separate us from the abiding love of God in Christ.

Actually, the entire section from Romans 5 onwards has been an argument about assurance. This is often mocked as arrogant and very self-centered. Romans weighs in on the meaning of justification: that God has declared all those who believe in the gospel to be in the right. The God who has called us in the gospel has declared that we are members of His family, and He will not let us go. The passage declares that on the final day God will reaffirm the verdict of being in the right on the basis of faith.

Paul uses five arguments to make his case.

- 8:31—God is for us—The Father is for us, giving us His very Son (8:32). The Son is for us, sacrificing His very life (8:34). The Spirit is for us, groaning and praying for us here and now (8:26). God is working all things for our good (8:28). In His person and providence, God is for us. I need to enter each day with this “for me” upbeat message.
- 8:32—Christ died for us when we were rebellious and defiant. How much more will He be for us, now that we are His?
- 8:33—God has made us right—We are declared to be so in Christ and we are being made to be so as the life of Christ is imparted to us in the power of the Spirit.
- 8:34—Christ intercedes for us. Both the Spirit (8:26-27) and the Lord Jesus plead our cause. The Lord Jesus is our ever faithful high priest at the right hand of glory itself, being our advocate. Romans 5:9-10 hinted at this. We are not only saved by His death, but also by His life. He always lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25).
- 8:35-39—Christ loves us—Christ will never fail us. But what if we fail Him? This section tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Note that God does not shelter us from the difficulties of life because we need them for our spiritual growth (5:3-5). In 8:28, He

assures us that the difficulties of life are working for us and not against us. God permits trials to come for our good and His glory. Furthermore, He provides power to conquer adversity (8:37). Nothing can separate us from Him. Our security is an established fact of being in Christ. The bottom line of Romans 8—No condemnation! No failed obligation! No need for frustration and discouragement! No separation or abandonment!

8:28-30—Romans 8:28 is a sweeping statement—God works for the good of believers, those who love God and are called according to His purpose. He says that God is intermingling all things for good to His faithful ones. Quite a claim—do we believe that? God is at work in time and eternity and working things according to His purpose. Romans 8:28 is both a comforting text and confounding one.

This line of thought agrees with Romans 5:3-5 as well as with the mention of sufferings and opposition in the earlier parts of Romans 8. His purpose is articulated in majestic language in 8:29-30—those He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Note that sanctification is not mentioned. Perhaps because sanctification is the one area where human cooperation is essential. God never appeals to us to be called, justified, or glorified, but there are numerous appeals to cooperate with Him in the realization of a set apart life.

8:29-30—Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification is cited and elaborated on in the Reformed *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and other attempts to theologically explain God's eternal purpose for us. But theological talk arises in the midst of our Christian walk. In our experience we begin to realize that we really have little to do with this redemptive trek we're on. It all comes from God. God marked us out for salvation, called us, gave us a purpose, plan, and task, nurtured us through the bumps and bruises of our experiences, and will bring us home in due time.

8:31-39—This is one of the most lyrical passages in all the Scripture. Paul is saying that if God is so loyal to His own that He sacrificed His very own Son for their eternal welfare, how can we not trust a loyalty like that. Here is a vision to take away all loneliness and fear. You can think of every terrifying thing that this or any other world could produce. None of them is able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lord of every terror and Master of everything and every world. Of what then shall we be afraid?

8:31-36—These verses begin the section where Paul expounds the wonderful position of the believer. The key sentence is right up front: “If God is for us, who can be against us” (8:31). God has acted in His Son and by His Spirit. That activity cost Him dearly. With the cross before us as the mighty demonstration of God's grace in giving His dearest to rescue the neediest, it follows that that grace will not withhold anything from us.

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions:

- Who can be against us if God is for us (8:31)? God poured out the life of His dearest Son to deliver, how will He not make good on this promised inheritance (8:32)?
- Who will bring any charge against us (8:33)? No one can successfully press any charges.
- Who condemns us (8:34)? Christ will never renounce the efficacy of His own work for His people. There can never be any condemnation (8:1).
- Who can separate from Christ's love (8:35)? Severance from the love of God in Christ is no more thinkable than the Father ceasing to love the Son He allowed to endure the cross,

apparently forsaken.

What glorious assurance! Paul applies the wonderful advocacy of God in 8:31 to the heavenly court in the day of judgment. The emphatic negative answers to these questions resonate with confident hope in the power and faithfulness of Almighty God.

8:37-39—This is the crescendo of the believer's assurance. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Created beings dare not. Time and space cannot. And nothing in creation would separate us for creation itself groans for our full realization as the children of God (8:22)

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