

## Introduction To Romans

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**Date:** The letter to the Romans is believed to have been written in about 57 A.D during Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, probably during his 3-month stay in Greece (Acts 20:3). This chronology is supported by Romans 15:25, Acts 19:21, 20:2,3,16, and I Cor.16:1-4. These passages indicate that Romans was written before Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, and at the close of Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Greece, both of which occurred upon his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey.

**Author:** As with his previous letters, Paul identifies himself as the author by name, and also by his work as an apostle (Romans 1:1). There is serious debate concerning the authorship of Romans.

**The Purpose Behind Romans:** Commentators throughout the history of Christianity have pointed out that the letter to the Romans is in some ways different from the rest of his letters. When compared, Romans seems somewhat a more formal overview of New Testament theology in Paul's words, rather than a personal letter to a familiar congregation needing solutions. This is most likely because Paul had not planted the church at Rome, nor had he been there (yet) at the time of writing Romans. Although he knew some people who were now there, the congregation as a whole was not known to Paul.

This lack of personal contact would explain why there are fewer specific mentions of particular problems in his letter to Rome. It would also explain Paul's need to be more formal and thorough in writing to them a summary of Christian theology, that they not only accept his words as being from God, but also that they might have the tools necessary to correct or support any thoughts or issues that they may face. By giving them a clear discussion of the truth, the church at Rome would be better protected against the future invasion of false teaching.

In terms of content, the letter to the Galatians is the most similar letter of all of Paul's writings to the letter to the Romans. For this reason the study of these letters together is often beneficial.

In the first 8 chapters of Romans Paul goes into great detail in discussing the relationship of faith, works, grace, and righteousness, in contrast to sin, death, works of the flesh, and the law. His points are illustrated by references to Adam, Abraham, and his own personal quest to be "right" in the sight of God.

In chapters 9-11 Paul discusses the plight of the Jews, due to their general rejection of Christ and God's purpose through Him. In these chapters Paul points out the basic error of theology that had developed among the Jews during the many centuries from the time of Moses to the 1<sup>st</sup> century. During that time the Jews (for the most part) had developed a system of works upon which they based their trust. As a result, their faith was not in God's power to save, but rather in their own ability to keep His law. This made it difficult for many Jews to accept or to even understand the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Thankfully, Paul noted that not all Jews had missed the point, but that some, along with many Gentiles, had embraced the gospel in its purity.

In chapters 12-15 Paul gives the Roman church some basic principles for Christian living that (apparently in terms of history) helped the church at Rome eventually become one of the strongest congregations in the world. In these chapters Paul discusses Christian behavior, submitting to the secular government, respecting the weaker brother, and bearing one another's burdens. In the final chapter Paul mentions his sister Phoebe, who apparently was the one who carried this letter to the church at Rome. Paul mentions a number of other personal names in this chapter, which may indicate the large number of Christians who were now living in Rome.

## Chapter 1

**:1-7** The apostle Paul begins this important letter to Rome by identifying himself as the human hand God was employing as His servant. Having been called to be an apostle by Jesus, he was separated out from the world to teach and to preach the gospel that had been promised to the world by God's prophets long ago. The gospel that Paul now was preaching was concerning God's Son who was born as a descendant of David, just as the Old Testament prophets had foretold. The power of God's Holy Spirit had proved to the world that Jesus was and is the Son of God. The final and ultimate proof of that fact was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead!

Paul viewed his being chosen to be an apostle as a work of God's grace. Certainly Paul had done nothing prior to his call on the road to Damascus to deserve such an opportunity. Yet, by God's grace Paul had been called, and through Paul's service God had brought about the obedience and faith of many from many nations. With these words Paul now begins his letter to the church at Rome, and to all those chosen to be his very own people.

**:8-15** Paul first gives thanks to God for the faith that the Christians in Rome were exhibiting to the world. Apparently the congregation in Rome was the talk of the Christian community. Not only was it located in the heart of the Roman empire, the church in Rome must have demonstrated an early abundance of faith in their ability to deal with trials, to reaching out to the people of a very pagan city, and as time went on, being able even to survive in the shadow of the Emperor. Having heard all these good things about them, we can sense that Paul could hardly contain himself as he longed to visit them, and to meet the members of this great congregation of saints. Although he had often planned to go to Rome, *something* had always kept him from actually making it there! Ironically, today's reader knows that Paul did indeed get to go to Rome, but that it was certainly not as Paul had planned. At this point, however, Paul was apparently not aware of how God's providence would take him there. In the meantime, Paul continued to dream of the day that he could win souls in the capital city. Having won many from uneducated and extremely isolated backgrounds, this great educator had no doubts that he could also win souls in the big city.

**:16-17** Paul's lack of fear in taking the gospel anywhere was based upon his absolute conviction that the gospel was the greatest news that could be given to anyone. He was not ashamed of it, for it was (and continues to be) the power of God for salvation. Paul's strength was his firm belief that everyone who believes can be saved by hearing and accepting the good news. It was given first to the Jews, but now it had spread and had been extended to the rest of the world, the gentiles. This is possible because anyone who has faith can enjoy the blessings of the gospel. It was not and is not reserved only for certain people from certain backgrounds! Such a message was obviously of great encouragement to the many non-Jews who heard Paul's message throughout the countryside villages. Now Paul is sending his same words of encouragement to the citizens of Rome.

**:18-32** At this point in his letter, Paul turns his attention from the good news, to some bad news about the world. God was very angry about the wicked and sinful things that the world was doing in an attempt to crush and suppress the truth. Paul states that even though God had revealed Himself to mankind by the visible evidences of creation, many of that day had chosen to reject Him. As a result, they now had no excuse for not believing in Him. The evidence of God's eternal power is revealed in the universe, because He who created the universe would have to be both all-powerful to create it, and also eternal. If He were not all-powerful, the universe would not now exist. If He were not eternal, how would He have been able to come into

existence? The reader of this letter throughout the ages may confirm that the deliberate rejection of these two obvious facts is still ongoing. The evidences of God's existence are just as clearly displayed before us as they were to those living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, yet many prefer to ignore God's character and attributes that have been revealed through His creation.

The reason for this rejection is now identified as being based upon the rebellious nature of the human heart, rather than a rejection based upon reason and logic. Paul states that those who refuse to recognize God and to be thankful to Him, do so *not* because they do not know Him, but because they *want* to allow their thoughts to be futile and their hearts to be darkened. In the process, such men and women may claim to be very wise and are seen as possessing great wisdom in the eyes of the world, but in reality such people have become very foolish.

One of the ways that ungodly men have often turned away from God throughout the ages has been by changing the nature of the "god" that they worship. As idolatry has taken many forms since the beginning, one favorite form was to make God in the image of one of the life forms that exist upon this earth. By changing the image of God from the Creator to the "created," man had essentially brought God *down to size*, putting Him on the same level as man. By changing the image of God into a man-made image, God could now be easily manipulated to be whatever man wanted Him to be! Unfortunately, such a concept of God quickly set the stage for many sinful practices to be established. Paul now speaks directly concerning a trend that has arisen whenever and wherever human society has turned their view away from the true nature of God.

One of the clear signs that any society existing in any generation has turned away from God is when the very basis of the human family and sexuality becomes perverted and twisted. When women begin seeking out other women rather than seeking out husbands to marry, this is a vivid sign that such a society has become darkened and futile in their thinking. When men become so confused about what is right and what is wrong that they begin to turn to each other for sexual gratification, they are in actuality doing what is shameful in the sight of God. While such a society sees this all as being "enlightened" and "progressive," the Bible states that those who practice such things will receive in themselves the penalty of their error. Taking this thought a step further, Paul informs his readers that those who refuse to keep a correct concept of God in their minds will end up doing many other things that are evil. Besides sexual immorality, Paul lists a small sampling of some of the offshoots of human rebellion. Covetousness, envy, murder, disobedience to parents; these are just a few of the consequences of man's rejection of his Creator. As man becomes ever more invested into such sins and "lifestyles," his hatred for God and even his fellow man also becomes greater. Truly verse 31 describes many today who have turned away from anything God has tried to teach mankind. Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful, are the words Paul uses to depict them. Surprisingly, Paul concludes that such men and women *still know* the righteous judgment of God upon such behavior, but still they persist in their practices, as they also support and approve of others who do the same things!

## Chapter 2

**:1-11** Paul's focus now turns from the heathen world to both Jews and Christians who may consider themselves more righteous than the world, yet in various ways may be just as guilty of sinful practices in their lives. God's judgment is always based upon truth, however the reader must be aware that human judgments can often be "half-blind." While seeing clearly the sins of others, human beings are frequently unable to see the sinfulness of their own behavior. Just as there is no excuse for the heathen who claims there is no God in order to do what they wish, there will also be no escape from judgment for the Christian who judges others concerning sins that they themselves readily embrace. The end result of living such hypocritical lives is that one may begin to actually *despise* the abundance of God's goodness, by refusing to allow God's patience to lead one's heart to repentance. When a man allows his heart to become hard without any remorse for sin, Paul now points out that such an individual is actually storing up *wrath* for himself on the Day of Judgment. These verses reconfirm that there is a specific day in which judgment will be rendered to all those who have lived upon this earth, and that the basis for the sentence delivered upon that day will be our deeds. God will indeed "render to each one according to his deeds (verse 6)." For those who have sought to truly repent of their sins, and have sought to love and serve God as He has loved us, eternal life and immortality will be our destiny. For those who are selfish, disobedient, and who want to do evil works, such souls will suffer an everlasting future of despair. Such a fate will come upon both Jews and Gentiles. Conversely glory, honor, and peace will surround those who choose to serve God, regardless of their racial background. Simply put, we can expect to find both Jewish and non-Jewish people in heaven, and there will also be Jews and non-Jews in hell. God will not save or condemn people based upon their nationality. Men and women will be lost or saved based upon their deeds, and their acceptance of God's gift of salvation.

**:12-16** These 5 verses comprise one of the more difficult passages in Romans to interpret. Following upon the heels of verse 11, it seems rational to conclude that the point of verse 12 is to extend the thought concerning God's fairness in His judgments. Since both Jews and non-Jews will be judged fairly, the question arises; "What will the basis for judgment of people who have lived in sin without knowledge of the law?" Verse 12 indicates that they will still be punished for their sinful lives, but not because they have disobeyed the written law, but rather because they lived their lives in disobedience to the basic "natural" concepts of right and wrong that seems to permeate the entire family of man. The overriding point here seems to be that God is fair, and that He is not going to condemn anyone for not following a law that they had no knowledge of, however even those isolated from the written Word of God will still be judged by what they have had an opportunity to know and to do. Verses 13-15 comprise a long parenthesis more fully explaining verse 12. This explanation begins by stating that those who do hear the law must also carry out the commands found within it in order to be just in the sight of God. In like manner, those non-Jews (without the written law) who show a willingness to be like God and to follow the basic principles of right and wrong in more of an instinctive manner, they too will be judged upon that foundation.

It is upon this point that many debates have been waged. Is there an instinctive knowledge of right and wrong that God has implanted in every soul? Is there a natural law to which all mankind has access? While the point can be made that many evil things have been practiced by the heathen, this only begs the question as to whether those evil acts were supported or were in opposition to their "nature." One might theorize that if there is a form of a "natural law" within all men, the evil practices found where the Bible has not gone shows the advantage

of having God's written Word. Individuals in such pagan societies may still strive to "follow their hearts" in doing what they see as right, despite what they see around them. In all cases, God will be the judge! Unfortunately some have taken such concepts to the extreme. For those who have the opportunity, yet choose to intentionally remain ignorant of God's Word, such ignorance provides no excuse. Such individuals will be judged by the very Scriptures they refused to know. For those searching for the truth in regions where the Bible is not available, certainly it is our challenge to get His Word to them. Although the concept of being judged "without the law" and becoming a "law unto themselves" may sound easier, we must consider how difficult such a life must be for those living with no real guidelines. Missionaries that have had the privilege of providing the written Word to those who have never had access to the Bible, often speak of the eagerness with which it is received.

**:17-24** Turning his focus back upon the Jews, Paul now strikes a blow at the basis of their confidence. Both the gospels and the epistles make it very clear that there were many Jews living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century who based their spiritual confidence upon two things; being descendants of Abraham, and by knowing and teaching the Law of Moses. As Jews, they considered themselves as "guides to those who were blind," namely anyone who was not a Jew. As they paraded about with their knowledge and insight, others (without their knowledge of the scriptures) were to them like "babies," fools who had no knowledge of the truth. Sadly, however, many such self-righteous Jews failed to even follow even the most fundamental teachings of the law. As they taught others the sinfulness of stealing, committing adultery, and submitting to idols, many of the Jews, even their leaders, were committing these very sins. To their shame, such behavior was causing the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.

**:25-29** Paul now begins to take his argument even deeper into the Jewish mindset. To the Jews, both then and now, one of the most primary evidences of being a Jewish man was to carry the mark of circumcision. With a shot to the heart, Paul now tells his Jewish readers that *circumcision is of no value if one does not keep the law*. In fact, Paul continues, if an uncircumcised man keeps the law and you (being circumcised) do not, in God's eyes such a man is "circumcised," and will judge those that merely bear the mark of circumcision! Now we must keep in mind that Paul's point here is not to get those Christians living in Rome to go back to Judaism, but rather Paul is building his case to help those who were of Jewish background to see the overall purpose of God's laws, going back even to the ordinance concerning circumcision. For the Jews, circumcision was an outward physical sign, however this simple operation did not make a man a Jew. Truly becoming one of God's people involved having a different heart, a heart that also had been (metaphorically) "circumcised" or altered. It was upon this principle that God built a nation from the children of Abraham. Over the centuries, however, many Jews failed to see the depth of the meaning of being an Israelite. Fortunately, those Jews that did have the heart that God had been looking for throughout the centuries were some of the very ones who accepted the teachings of Jesus. As they became the first to be added to Christ's church, they also were the first to truly understand what it means to be justified by faith. Paul is now laying the foundation for this important discussion that is to follow.

### Chapter 3

**:1-8** Paul now counter balances the basic point he had pressed in chapter 2. Having pointed out the hypocrisy of many of the Jews, and having also pointed out the insignificance of being circumcised, Paul now asks an obvious question. “What advantage then has the Jew?” Perhaps surprisingly to his readers, Paul answers his own question by stating that there is much advantage to being a Jew. First of all, the Jews were the ones to whom God had given His oracles (sayings/scriptures). If it were not for the Jews, there would have been no conduit through which God’s written word could have flowed into the world. Since the Jews were given this honor and responsibility, it was the Jews who were the most prepared for the Messiah to come into the world. Although many ended up rejecting Jesus, many Jews *did* believe in Him, becoming the first Christians.

Those Jews who rejected Jesus, however, did not take away from the unshakable truth of God’s words, and the dependability of God. God is righteous in what He does, no matter how sinful man may be in his response to God’s word. The fact that countless men and women have responded to God’s plan to save mankind in a rebellious way does not tarnish or in anyway impugn the dignity or the goodness of God. The fact that some of the Jews (to whom God had entrusted His Oracles) were now rejecting Jesus as being the very fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, did not diminish the dependability of God’s Word.

At the same time, however, since all men are sinners, the fact that God’s Word and His plan was totally geared toward granting forgiveness to man does not mean that God wants man to do evil things so that He can show His goodness. This, apparently, was what many critics of Paul’s teachings were saying. Such critics (perhaps many Jews) saw God’s grace as a “license to sin,” rather than a foundation of hope. Those who willingly wish to misunderstand God’s free gift of salvation will, in the end, deserve their own condemnation and judgment.

**:9-20** Paul now widens the discussion to include both Jews, Gentiles, and Christians, with the question; “Are we better than they?” His following statement is that “all are under sin.” This is followed by a combination of quotes from the Old Testament. Verses 10-12 are a paraphrase of Psalms 14:1-3, verse 13 is the basic idea of Psalms 5:9, verse 14 can be found in Psalms 10:7, verses 15-17 are a paraphrase of Isaiah 59:7, and verse 18 is a partial quote from Psalm 36:1. Paul’s training had given him extensive knowledge of the Old Testament. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul now puts together these various passages into an amazing collage that perfectly summarizes the overall condition of mankind without a savior.

Simply put, without God’s help, all of mankind is in a hopeless position due to sin. Yet, despite man’s sinfulness tendencies, God gave man His law. By giving man a law to live by, God revealed to man how sinful a creature he truly is. Man, without God’s help, is guilty and has nothing to say to excuse himself in the sight of the law. Furthermore, the harder man tries to make himself right before God by his law keeping, the further into debt to God he sinks! This is not to say that the Law was bad, but that its purpose was to help man know what sin was, and to know when he had violated God’s Law.

**:21-26** Fortunately for mankind there is an avenue of righteousness that does not come through the Law. If man were capable of perfectly keeping the Law, then such a provision would not have been needed. God, however, knew from the beginning that man was in need of a Savior. The whole point of the Law was to make man aware of what sin is, and how sinful man is. Having led man to this awareness, a righteousness of God, which is through faith in Jesus, has now been provided. Although there were certain privileges to having been a Jew, the opportunity to now be justified by God’s grace was now available to all who had faith in Him. There is no

difference! All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but at the same time all can be justified freely by His grace! For those who truly understood Paul's letter, these were words of great hope and encouragement. To those, however, who refused to admit their need for a savior, only condemnation.

Jesus was set forth to be a *propitiation* by His blood. The basic concept of this unusual word is an "atoning sacrifice." In the pagan world, sacrifices were made to calm the angry gods. This practice had likely been a perversion of the original concept of offering sacrifices to the true God in a show of love and appreciation for His blessings, and also to show obedience. Jesus' sacrifice fulfilled the requirement of a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. Those who were benefited first from His sacrifice were the many generations of God-fearing Jews who had lived and died before the cross. Simply put, all of the sins of God's people committed prior to Jesus' death were forgiven by His atoning blood. Turning his attention then to the present, Paul also makes clear that the propitiation through the blood of Jesus is now also the means by which those living after the cross are justified. Jesus is the justifier of those who have true faith in Jesus.

**:27-31** Having considered the real basis for our justification, Paul now asks the rhetorical question; "What is left for us to brag about?" The clear answer is; "There's not a thing we can brag about when it comes to our salvation." Can anyone honestly claim justification on the basis of law-keeping? Has any man or woman ever lived that has kept the Old Testament to perfection? Although the most obvious application of this passage is to the Law of Moses, the Greek text leaves out the definite article "the" when referring to "law," thus clearly ruling out the potential of any "law-keeping" providing justification for man. Using somewhat of a play on words, however, Paul states that there is a "law" that can justify man. It is the law of faith. Unlike any other law, the "law of faith" is based upon God's grace, and Jesus' sacrifice. In essence, the law of faith is not founded upon man's works, but rather God's determined work through the ages to bring salvation to mankind. Paul also notes that God's overall plan was and is to reach both Jews and Gentiles. Seeing that this is a "law of faith," Paul now makes it clear that both those who are circumcised and those who are not can and will be justified by having faith in Christ.

With these words Paul is not implying that man should not strive to keep God's commands. As the Jews living under the Law of Moses strove to obey God, we also should seek to follow the teachings and the examples of Christ. However, even if we keep His commandments fairly well, even better than most, we still cannot claim such obedience as our justification! To do so is to take our focus away from Jesus, placing it squarely upon ourselves.

Note, however, that in the final verse of this chapter, Paul clarifies the purpose of law. Understanding that we are justified by our faith in Jesus does not nullify the value of law. Mankind needs laws to live by. Our society itself would self-destruct if it were not for civil laws. Much more so, mankind needs God's guidance in our everyday lives, and in learning how to draw nearer to Him. Although our obedience to His commands does not provide justification, our obedience to His commands does help us in many other ways. Not only can they bring us much happiness and many blessings in this life, they also form a fertile soil in which faith can survive and grow. Ultimately, once in eternity, we may also look back and see how well His Word prepared us in this life for the life to come!

## Chapter 4

**:1-4** Paul now speaks directly to those Christians in Rome who shared his Jewish heritage. Pulling out the heavy artillery, Paul brings up one of the names from history that both Jews and Christians held in the highest esteem. “What had Abraham our father found out about this subject (being saved by faith)?” Paul now answers his own question by stating that Abraham himself, the father of the Jewish nation, had not been justified by his works. This is not to say that Abraham had not accomplished many good things in God’s sight. That is not Paul’s point. His point is that Abraham’s justification in God’s sight was not based upon his works, but that his right relationship with God was based upon his faith. The scriptures themselves say that “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).” The good things that Abraham did came out of that faith, that is certain, but it was not upon the basis of his good works that Abraham could claim justification! It may seem like Paul is splitting hairs on this point, but in the final analysis such a distinction makes all the difference in the world. If Abraham had become “right with God” based solely upon his works, then Abraham could brag about his accomplishment. If salvation can be earned, then it is no longer by God’s grace, it is rather a debt that God would owe to man. This, however, is just simply not the case.

**:5-8** The truth is, man cannot make God accept us into His covenant relationship based upon something that we have done. The wording of verse 5 may imply that God does not want people who work for Him, but that is a misunderstanding. God wants people who *do not trust in their own works*, but rather trust in God for their justification. It is God who makes right those who have been “wrong,” and such forgiveness is based clearly upon their faith and trust in God’s power to save! David himself was a vivid example of God’s forgiveness, and David spoke about this in Psalm 32:1-2. “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven...” Such words show that even those living under the Old Law understood that forgiveness came from God, not from the works of man. It is by God’s grace that man can even hope to have sins that no longer cling to him, that by God’s mercy such sins will no longer be imputed to mankind.

**:9-12** Having further established that forgiveness and righteousness are not acquired and achieved by human law-keeping, Paul now returns to the “circumcision” issue. While we may not see the importance of this re-occurring discussion, to the early Jewish Christians it was front and center! Take whatever the current “hot topic” might be within Christian circles today and replace that with the topic of circumcision in the early church, and you might be able to grasp some idea of how important this issue was to them. Apparently for many of those Jews who became the first Christians, letting go of Jewish religious practices was very difficult. Yet as time passed, the transition did begin to take place. Animal sacrifices, religious holy days, the concept of the priesthood, these and many other Old Testament practices began to be replaced and fulfilled through the teachings and the sacrifice of the Messiah. Circumcision it seemed, however, remained a matter of contention within the early church for some time. To the Jewish mind the circumcision of all their male children was a mark of distinction from the pagan world, which indeed it was intended to be under the Old Law. Since it was a physical surgery carried out at the point of birth, we can be assured that all the God-fearing Jewish men who made up the early church were already circumcised when they became Christians, and that they remained circumcised until their death! One can imagine that the first Jewish couple to discontinue this practice with their newborn baby boy would have felt the peer pressure of all the circumcised males in the church. “Dare we reject the traditions of our family and church friends, and risk being considered a part of the outside pagan world?” Certainly we can see how powerful the influence of this tradition must have been upon the early Jewish Christians.

To help those descendants of Abraham get past this issue, Paul now points out a very important historical fact. Chronologically, Abraham himself was counted as being righteous *years before* the rite of circumcision had been given as a requirement under the Old Covenant. Abraham was counted as being righteous before God due to his faith in Genesis 15:6, which was before Ishmael was conceived. This would have been prior to Abram's 86<sup>th</sup> birthday (Gen.16:16). According to Gen.17:24, Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised, for it was not until that point in time that God had first given this command to Abraham and all his future descendants. Simply put, Abraham was considered "righteous" on the basis of his faith in God *more than 13 years before* he was ever circumcised. Paul mentions this point not to take away from the value of circumcision under the Old Law, but simply to help those early Christians to see that there was such a thing as "righteousness" before circumcision was given to the Jews, and that there can now be righteousness for all mankind now (under the New Covenant) now that circumcision is no longer a requirement of God's people. In a sense, Abraham served as an example to both Jews and Gentiles, for he bridged the gap between them. Abraham was not only the physical father of the Jewish people, but having shown belief in God prior to actually becoming a "Jew" himself, he also was an example to the Gentiles. Both the circumcised and the uncircumcised can see Abraham as an example of how one can become righteous, regardless of their racial background.

**:13-25** Paul now directs his readers' attention to the promise that God had made to Abraham. We are reminded of God's promise that he would have many descendants, and that the great nation that would come from him would be given much land in Canaan. Paul again now points out the order of events. These land/seed promises were first made to Abraham even before the Law of Moses had been given. It was Abraham's faith that formed the basis for the giving of these promises to Abraham, not his ability of keeping any law. We may note here again (as in chapter 3) that in the Greek text, the word translated "law" is not combined with a definite article. The Contemporary English Version (and some other translations) takes this fact into account as it translates verse 13 in this way; "This promise wasn't made because Abraham had obeyed a law, but because his faith in God made him acceptable."

Taking this thought a step further, if the promise that God had given to Abraham had depended upon Abraham's law-keeping, both Abraham and his descendants would have lost out on their promised inheritance, for neither Abraham nor his descendants could have earned such a great promise with perfection in regards to the law. In addition, if law-keeping could earn the blessings of God, that (theoretically) would nullify the value of faith. The Contemporary English Version puts it this way in verse 14; "If Abraham and his descendants were given this promise because they had obeyed a law, then faith would mean nothing, and the promise would be worthless." The simple fact of the matter is that law in itself only points out transgressions. Law is simply law. It offers no power or strength to keep the law; it only offers the wrath of the law maker(s) when it is broken. This is true of any law. A speed limit sign in itself gives the driver no power to keep or break that law. It only offers the threat of a ticket if found in violation of that law! If there were no civil laws, for example, theoretically there would be no need for the highway patrol, or any law enforcement throughout our country, because there would be nothing to transgress. Seeing that men such as Abraham could be found righteous even before the law of Moses was given, is an argument intended to help those early Jewish Christians to see past their own law-keeping, and to see where their righteousness was really based.

All good things that come from God are based upon our faith in His great grace and kindness. It is for this reason that His most important promise (that of eternal life and salvation) is available now to all who believe, not just those who grew up with the law (the Jews), but also

to all those who have the faith of Abraham, even if they are not his physical descendants! As we are again reminded of what is said in Genesis, this time in chapter 17:5, in which Abraham's name is changed from "Abram" to "Abraham." The significance of that change was that Abraham was now promised to become "the father of many nations." This is the essence of faith, believing in what God has said even before there is any visible confirmation of what He has promised. If God can create things that never existed previously, and if God can raise the dead to life, He certainly can bring His promises to reality! When God first made His great promise to Abraham, Abraham and his wife were childless. In addition, the land that they were promised was owned and occupied by the Canaanites. There was no sign or visible indication that either of these aspects of the promise would ever come true. Yet, Abraham believed, and he never doubted God's promise. As he approached the ripe old age of 100, and even though his wife Sarah had never been able to have children, Abraham did not question God's promise. Somehow, someway, even though idol worshippers (as well as many faithless people) must have surrounded him in his life, Abraham found within himself the ability to believe in God. In so doing he found great strength, as he gave all the credit to his Lord. Abraham was one of those rare men in history who was absolutely convinced of the trustworthiness of God's Word, and as a result he stands for all time as an example of what it means to be made righteous by faith. This was why the life and the story of Abraham were written, so that all men of all generations may develop that same kind of faith. Just as Abraham believed in the land/seed promise that God had made to him, in like manner we can believe in God's promise to deliver us from our offenses. Our Lord and Savior was raised from the dead so that we can be raised to higher ground, being justified by His grace.

## Chapter 5

**:1-5** Building upon the foundation of his previous points, Paul now begins with a "therefore." Therefore, since we have been justified through our Lord Jesus, we now have *peace* with God. It is also through Jesus that we are allowed to have entrance into His undeserved kindness, as we are happy at the thought of someday being in His presence and basking in His glory. For the present, however, Paul expresses his joy to be able to suffer as a Christian. Why would Paul say this? Simply because Paul was spiritually mature enough to see that it was through his suffering that he was developing endurance and patience. Paul also saw that such patience and endurance was also helping him to develop character. Through the eye of faith, Paul could then see how character was helping him to build yet another necessary virtue, and that was the quality of hope. Such a well-grounded hope was based upon such a foundation that it would never disappoint, simply because Paul knew first hand the love that God had poured out into his heart through the Holy Spirit.

**:6-11** By comparison, Paul now looks back to what he (and all his fellow Christians) were like before they were saved. At that time, we were all sinful and basically helpless. What could we have really done to make up for our past sins? What could we have done to save ourselves? Seeing that we couldn't help ourselves, was there anyone else to be found who could help us? Paul now looks at human nature. In the daily news it is very rare to see an example of a man dying for another man, even if the one he is giving his life for is a good and "righteous" man (in human terms). In this vein of thought, Paul now expresses his utter amazement at the fact that God sent His Son to die for us even though we were not good or righteous. Now some living today may wish to argue the point that we were not born yet when Jesus died, and that we were not sinful at the time. This is missing the point. The point is that we are all sinful, and although

Christ died long before we can upon the scene, we are in the same condition in regards to sin that Paul and those living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century were in. We have not only sinned, we are sinful! If it were not for the blood of Jesus, we would all be lost in our sinfulness, and there would be nothing to save us from wrath. We have every reason to rejoice that God's grace reached out to us and pulled us from the wreckage that we all have made of our lives, reconciling us to God even while we were His "enemies." Having been saved, we now have the ability to enjoy the peace that His forgiveness now affords.

**:12-21** Paul now widens his focus to consider not only the solution to man's sin problem, but also the beginning of it. It all began with the first human beings on earth. Now of course the Bible student knows that it was Eve that sinned first, but perhaps due to the fact that Adam was the head of the household, and also to better fit his comparison, Paul goes back to the first man who sinned, that being Adam. His contrast is that just as through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, in the same but opposite manner through one man (Jesus) sin has been taken away.

Unfortunately many have taken this passage to mean that all mankind has inherited the sins of Adam, thus also coming up with the false doctrine that all babies are born in sin! This is not Paul's point at all. He is simply stating that it was through Adam sin *entered* the world, and from there it spread, since all men do sin. Paul *does not say* that it was through Adam that we all were born with **Adam's** sins.

In verse 13 Paul clarifies a point concerning the law. Even though the law of Moses had not yet been given, there was such a thing as "sin" from the time of Adam up to the time of Moses. Although one might say that there was no *written law* by which man could be imputed with sin, God did speak to man and conveyed His will to the patriarchs. Thus there was such a thing as "sin" prior to the giving of the law of Moses. Yet man's disobedience prior to the time of Moses was not called "sin" because it was a transgression of a law that had not yet be given, but because even prior to the law man could and did violate God's oral commands. Even though there was this time period from Adam to Moses, spiritual separation (death) between mankind and God did take place. Not everyone during that time, however, were separated from God by disobeying a direct command (as Adam had), but many became spiritually dead by disobeying commands that God had clearly given to their fathers and their ancestors. With these thoughts, Paul is making sure that the reader understands that sin had reigned from the time of Adam to the present. Man has always needed a Savior!

Getting back to his point of contrast, in several ways Adam is like Jesus Christ. Through Adam came sin, and through Jesus came forgiveness. Jesus and Adam are like equal yet opposite spiritual bookends with all of mankind sandwiched in-between. Adam's sin led to punishment. (Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden.) With Adam's example, many others followed. Yet joyfully Jesus' life here upon this earth was without sin, and His sacrifice lead to the forgiveness of sins for all mankind. Like a king on his throne, death reigned because Adam (and everyone since) has sinned. Yet, by the grace and power of God, Jesus now reigns over death, and over all who accept His grace!

## Chapter 6

**:1-14** Having now said so much about the grace of God, Paul now sees the need to insert an “equalizing” statement. He does so by asking a rhetorical question, and then immediately answering it. “Shall we continue in sin so that God can give us even more grace?” It is such a foolish question that Paul seems to make himself angry with it. “God forbid!” If that is one’s response to God’s gift of grace, then such a one has no real grasp of how good it is to no longer be living in the grip of sin. An essential part of becoming a Christian is the “death to sin” process. With this thought, Paul begins perhaps the best explanation of the symbolism of baptism found anywhere in the N.T. Anyone who would want to sin more to have more grace apparently does not understand that the beginning symbolism of baptism is the burial part. When people die physically, their family has them buried. It is not a pleasant thought, but it has to be done. In this same sense, when one is baptized with a full understanding, he or she must first be buried because they (spiritually) have died to the life that they have lived previously. Note that this symbolism fit perfectly when baptism is carried out according to Bible teachings and examples. Seeing that one who dies physically must be completely buried in the earth, in the same way one who is truly baptized must also be completely buried in water. The traditions of man that developed well after the church was established brought into practice the use of sprinkling or pouring water over the head of those requesting baptism. Such practices do not fit with the meaning of the word “baptism,” or fit with the “burial” metaphor being used in this passage.

Fortunately for all candidates for baptism, the act of baptism does not end with the burial! Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so too are we raised from the “burial” of baptism to walk a new way, to have a new purpose, and to (spiritually) have a new life! For all who have ever submitted to baptism, the resurrection of Jesus is our pattern and our hope. Based firmly and soundly upon His being raised from the dead, in the same way all who obey His will have the hope of being raised from our “death” to sin, and having the power of God to raise us up, giving us a new life without our dependence upon our old ways. In a spiritual sense, when one is baptized, he or she is actually united with Jesus both in our “death” and in our “resurrection.” This process, as difficult as it might seem, is a process that must take place if we are ever to be freed from our slavery to sin. Death must precede life. Crucifixion must precede resurrection! Once one understands, accepts, and submits to these key concepts, we can begin to live in Christ.

Knowing all this, Paul now urges his readers to stay true to their decisions made at the point of their conversions. Those who have been baptized into Christ’s death must continue to be dead to their past lives. Although Paul does not come out and say it here, his concern was that some of his brethren who had died to their “old man of sin” were growing weak, and perhaps some had gone back and dug up their “old man” of sin! The exhortation here is for them to reckon themselves dead to sin. Now that you have buried your old ways, don’t let them come back and live in you again. Don’t let any aspect of your body or mind be controlled by sin. If you are really are now a Christian, sin must not have control or dominion over you again. Contrary to what an unspiritual mind might think, fully understanding God’s grace actually produces less sin, not more!

**:15-23** Picking up where he began this chapter Paul asks the same basic question; “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” There are always going to be those who interpret God’s grace as a license to sin. To prevent such a misunderstanding of God’s gift of grace; Paul again vigorously answers his own question. “Certainly not!” Those who fully accept God’s grace are not lawless people just because we are not saved under the law, or on the basis of

what the law says. In fact, being under grace gives us the freedom **from** condemnation to serve God, not the freedom **to** sin! To more fully illustrate his point, Paul brings up the emotional subject of slavery. Simply put, we all serve someone, but there are only 2 choices. It will either be God or Satan. In a spiritual sense, we either are slaves (servants) to righteousness which leads to life, or to sin which leads to death. Seeing our choices, we should be eternally thankful to God for delivering us from death. By accepting the pure teachings of Christ, many to whom Paul wrote had been set free from the bondage of sin. To be more specific, Paul speaks of “presenting your members” as slaves of uncleanness. In today’s terms, Paul is simply speaking of the practice of the ungodly allowing the different parts of their bodies to become slaves to the sinful thoughts of the mind. His urging is that those who have given their lives to Christ must now complete the process of allowing Jesus to gain control of every aspect of their lives, including the ways their physical bodies are used!

Looking back once again, Paul refers to the mental and spiritual condition all were in before they gave their lives to Christ. At that point, all were slaves (totally given) to sin. Here Paul makes a strange but accurate observation. When we were slaves to sin, we were (from that point of view) “free” in regard to righteousness. In other words, being slaves to sin we didn’t have to be concerned about pleasing God! Certainly we all have known our share of worldly people who seem to be thoroughly enjoying their “freedom” from God and righteousness. There is no denying that such “freedom” brings with it some passing pleasures and a sense of power and independence. If this were not so, why do so many choose this path? Sadly, however, for those who do, this path of life will bring no fruit. In time, all they will have to show for their sin is shame and spiritual death. Although some may keep up the charade to the grave, even the worst sinner usually begins to see the “fruits” (or the lack thereof) of his sinful life long before he leaves this earth.

Paul now concludes this great chapter with these wonderful words of hope. Those who have accepted Christ now have been set free from sin. This is in great contrast to those who have become slaves to sin. As servants of God, the fruit we bear is a living fruit that brings to us holiness. The meaning of this term is that we become “separate” and set apart from the world. Indeed, if we give our lives to Jesus and remain faithful, we will never again “fit into” this world as before. The reason for this is simple but profound. As willing slaves/servants to God, we will inherit everlasting life. For those who are dead to Christ and facing the 2<sup>nd</sup> death in eternity, the concept of eternal life is incomprehensible. Those who are dead to Christ see only the wages of sin. From Satan’s view, spiritual “death” is a wage collected for a job well done. As sinners without Christ all have earned such a wage. Fortunately this verse does not end here. The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus our Lord. If it were not for His gift, we would have to accept our “wages.” Can you imagine employees on payday patiently waiting in line to receive their wages of death? Would some try to run away, refusing their “pay?” If it were not for the sacrifice and the grace of God, such would be our lot, but there would be no escape. The wages of our sin would be upon us, whether we wanted them or not! Let us remember this anytime we begin to think, even for a moment, that our salvation is based upon our goodness. It is by His grace we are saved, as we humbly and graciously accept it as the true gift that it is.

## Chapter 7

Although the reader may think that the subject has now changed to marriage and divorce, Paul is actually still on the subject of grace and law. For the sake of illustration, however, he turns to marriage and divorce to make several important points. To begin with, it is a “given” that any law only has dominion or power over a man for as long as he lives. Giving a specific example, Paul applies this principle to marriage. A woman is bound by the Law of Moses to her husband only for as long as he lives. If her husband dies, it was (and still is) an obvious fact that she is no longer bound to her husband in marriage. Any Jew or Christian (and many pagans) would agree upon this principle. Marriage does not have an “expiration date!” If at any time a woman should choose to marry another man while her husband still lives, she would rightly be called “an adulteress,” because she would then be breaking the vows of her promise to her 1<sup>st</sup> husband. We should note that Paul’s main purpose in this passage is not to thoroughly discuss the subject of marriage and divorce, but to draw several points from this discussion. In this passage Paul does not discuss the issue of what a woman (or man) is to do if their mate has been unfaithful, or if their spouse has deserted them. These are subjects dealt with in Matthew 19:9 and I Corinthians 7:15. In fact, in this example Paul does not even mention that the woman ever bothers to get a divorce. His example is simply that of a married woman marrying another man while her (we assume) faithful husband still lives.

Now what does Paul want his readers to make of this illustration? Simply this; just as a woman is free to marry another upon the death of her husband, so is an individual freed from the law when we die to it. We know that when Jesus died upon the cross He put to death the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph.2:15). When one accepts Christ, he or she must then personally “die to the law” and to the desires to sin that the law awakened in our lives. By so doing we are then freed from that 1<sup>st</sup> husband, becoming free to (so to speak) to “marry” again, with this 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage being to Christ. While most Christians understand that Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses and paid for our sins upon the cross, Paul now delves into yet another element to this discussion.

**:7-12** Having already touched upon this in verse 5, Paul now goes deeper, making sure that his point is not misunderstood. In a way, the law that God had given man had stirred within man a desire to sin. There is something about human beings that, when we are given rules, we tend to want to challenge them. Paul does not mean by this that God’s law was bad, or that it was responsible for the sins of mankind. On the contrary, Paul was saying that the law was actually good for man in the sense of helping man to know what was good or bad in God’s sight. If it were not for God giving us some direction as to what is according to His will and what is not, how would we ever know what is acceptable behavior? Unfortunately, however, along with the giving of the law came with it the opportunity for our Adversary to use those commandments against us! Just as Eve was tempted to eat the *one fruit* in the garden that was forbidden, so does the law produce within man all kinds of evil desires? In Leviticus 18:5 God’s people were told that if they kept His statutes and His judgments, they would live by them. Ideally this was true. If man kept them all, he would live by them. In reality, however, no man can make that claim. This is apparently the thought behind verse 10 in which Paul states; “And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.” The end result of a perfect and holy law being applied to imperfect human beings spells death to any man striving to be justified by it! Keep in mind that the one speaking these words was previously a highly educated Pharisee. In verse 11 Paul boldly states that sin had “tricked” him by using the law to *separate* him from his God. Rather than becoming *more like God* in his nature, he became *more sinful*, as the law was used

against him, drawing his focus upon himself and his desires rather than drawing him closer to God and helping him develop a godly nature.

**:13-25** As always, Paul goes the extra step in making sure that he is not misunderstood. His point has not been to say that the law was evil. Just because it brought about death or “separation” between himself and God, does not imply that the law itself was bad. On the contrary, the law is what helped Paul to see the reality of sin. The fact that human beings are so easily controlled by their desires makes any effort to apply God’s laws upon man a clear proof of how carnal man can be. If the devil’s misuse of the law has brought about such sin, then one might wonder why God even gave it in the first place. The answer is that once man sees what Satan can do with something that was intended for good, it is then we can really see how evil the devil really is, and the true depth of the wickedness of sin!

It is at this point that Paul reveals an extended inner debate that either had or was presently taking place in his life. Much debate has been waged as to which part of Paul’s life is here being described. Some say he is speaking of what he went through *before* he became a Christian, while others conclude that it was an ongoing battle that Paul was experiencing *since* his conversion. Certainly one can safely say that Paul had experienced such struggles with sin before he found Jesus. Prior to conversion, most honest souls would admit that they were guilty of doing things that they hated to do, and often failed to do the things that they really should’ve done. But does this problem completely come to an end when one becomes a Christian? One must either be dishonest or naïve to think that the battle between the flesh and the spirit is no longer fought after conversion. It is a doctrine that some hold to, but in reality no one can honestly say they have arrived at perfection after baptism! For these reasons, and based upon many other passages we could refer to, one must conclude that Paul was also speaking of the ongoing struggle that every Christian continues to face. That is why Paul uses the present tense. Even as a Christian he sees himself doing things from time to time that he hates. Even as a redeemed child of God he was often guilty of failing to do things that he truly wanted to do. The fact that Paul was even concerned about such failings is further proof that these are the words of a man who wanted to serve Christ. One could say that there are many people who sin constantly and repeatedly on a daily basis with no remorse or concern. Yet Paul speaks of doing “the things that he hates,” and failing to do “the good that he willed to do.”

Having said all this, however, Paul was not willing to throw in the towel. He was still resisting. When he failed to live up to God’s law, it was sin working in his body that was warring against the law of his mind. Even though he was found guilty of breaking God’s laws, he still delighted in the law of God. On the inside, he knew which way his life was pointed, and the direction in which he was aiming. Yet each time he failed, Paul also became more aware of what was wrong. Rather than looking to himself, he was forced by his failures and sin to look outside himself. As someone has said, when we become overwhelmed with the failures of our flesh, we must realize that we are casting our anchor *inside the boat!* For every time we look to ourselves for strength, we must take 100 looks to Jesus. Paul’s inner debate now is brought to a head with words that speak for every contrite soul. “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Is there anyone that can do this, is there anyway we can get away from the death and destruction that we have spiritually brought upon ourselves? With one of the most relieving verses found anywhere in the Bible, Paul answers his own question with a prayer of thanks. “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Although many have misunderstood this chapter, Paul’s goal was not to trivialize sin or to minimize the importance of obedience. Yet at the same time it is a lesson in reality. We are spiritual creatures living in the flesh. For those who strive to serve God, the war will continue until we leave this earth.

## Chapter 8

**:1-11** The resolution to all the frustration, guilt, and stress described in chapter 7 is now passionately proclaimed. Like a fresh mountain stream, these words of hope pour from Paul's lips; "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!" Rather than living in the hopeless state of knowing that our works fall far short of God's glory, Paul now declares that if we are in Christ, there is no sentence of punishment to be ruled against us. This promise is made to those who do not *walk* according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Although Paul has previously admitted that the battle between his mind and his flesh was ongoing (using the present tense), he now can see that as a Christian, one law trumps the other. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ had set him free from the law of sin and death! This is not to say that the flesh no longer has an effect upon him, but rather that it has now met its match! Before receiving the Spirit of God and before he was given an understanding of God's grace, Paul (and any Christian) had no strength to fight the battle with sin and the guilt that came with it. The law could only point out his failings. What the Law of Moses could not do, Jesus did! Although God sent His Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, fortunately for all mankind, He was not like us in the sin department. If He had been, His sacrifice would have been of no value to us. Billions of people have died since the beginning of time. Only the death of Jesus provided the gift of atonement for all who receive it. This is because His perfection fulfilled the requirements of the law, thus becoming a *substitutionary fulfillment of the law* for all mankind. This substitution, however, only benefits those who chose to walk according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh.

It is at this point that Paul may seem to be reasoning in circles. Previously he has said; "I am a sinner, I don't do what I want to do!" Then he said; "Only Jesus can redeem me from this body of death!" But now he seems to be saying; "We have to live according to the Spirit in order to have the gift of God so that we can live the godly life!" If that is the case, then the obvious question would be; "If Paul couldn't live the life before, how could he now live a life that could be deemed worthy of God's Spirit?"

The break in the circle of reasoning is this; once Paul realized that righteousness could only be his through Christ, he accepted this gift and was set free from the *condemning power* of the law of sin and death. Armed now with this freedom that forgiveness brings, Paul was able to be filled with the Spirit, which empowered him to no longer *walk* according to the flesh. This is not to imply that Paul now saw himself above sin, but rather that he was now led by the Spirit rather than his flesh. In short, as a Spirit-led Christian, Paul was now able to sin less and to serve more. Being led by the Spirit of God was helping him to win the war against the flesh and the carnal mind that had once controlled his life.

Some have tried to explain this difficult passage by creating a doctrine dubbed "the second working of grace." With this teaching they see a grace that first saves, and then at some later point finally transforms a sinful human being into one that no longer sins! Others go to the opposite extreme, and explain this passage with a concept called "dualism," by which man can be both pure in spirit while being completely evil in the flesh. Neither of these doctrines correctly represents what Paul is teaching, nor can they be reconciled with other New Testament teachings. In the final analysis, any sincere and honest Christian must admit that even their best efforts fall short of perfection, while on the other hand one who is truly led by the Spirit will show the effects of a Spirit-filled life in their flesh. God's Spirit does make a difference, and the more we submit to His will, the greater the difference others will see in our lives. That growth, however, will always be ongoing. There is no such thing as human perfection. If it were possible, Jesus

would not have needed to be our substitutionary sacrifice! Fortunately for all mankind, the same Spirit that brought Jesus alive out of the tomb, lives within all those who belong to Christ. It is His Spirit that breathed life into man in the beginning, and it is the indwelling of His Spirit that gives spiritual life to those who love His Son.

**:12-17** Having reminded the brethren in Rome of the basis of their salvation, Paul now urges them to not return to living according to the flesh. Apparently some there had gone back to their old man of sin, returning to that which was supposed to have been buried with Christ at the point of their conversion. Simply put, if a Christian thinks he or she can go back to living for the express purpose of pleasing the flesh, that individual will face spiritual death. Conversely, if one allows God's Spirit to have His way in his life, the Spirit can and will successfully begin to win battles against the flesh. Paul's point is basic and crucial to our spiritual survival. If we are saved from our sins, the Holy Spirit is now living in us. If He is in us, He is also leading us. This simple point is what makes us sons of God. One cannot be a child of God without being Spirit-led; it is a part of the definition of being a Christian. But what are the signs of having God's Spirit within us? One sign is the blessing of becoming free from fear. Outside of Christ we were lost and we were afraid because we were in bondage to sin. Even the most hardened sinner knows they are mortal, and that the end is coming. If one is aware of nothing else, he is aware of that. As a replacement to such fear and bondage to sin, the Spirit-filled Christian is given the assurance of knowing that he or she has been adopted and can freely speak to our Creator in such an endearing way as "Abba Father." (The term "Abba" is an Aramaic word, and was a familiar term by which children addressed their father. An equivalent in English would be "Dad" or "Daddy.") As children of God, we can also claim the rights of an "heir." In this sense, we are joint-heirs with Christ, seeing that He is God's Son. The conscientious Christian may not be comfortable with this statement, fearing blasphemy in saying what may seem to be putting ourselves on an equal plane with Christ. However, Paul says this to emphasize the honor that we are given through Christ in allowing us to become "sons of God" by being given His Spirit. In so being, we will both suffer with Christ, as we will someday be glorified together with Him, and with all who love Him.

**:18-30** In considering these two aspects of Christianity, Paul sees the suffering that Christians may experience as being relatively nothing in comparison to the glory that is in store for all who remain faithful to Jesus. In fact, as Paul puts it, "all of creation" was waiting in anticipation for God to reveal the identity of all of His children. In a very interesting way, Paul goes on to speak about "creation" as a sort of living entity. Paul also says that from the beginning creation had been subjected to confusion or "futility." This was not, he continues, because "creation" wanted to be confused, but that it was a part of God's plan to force "creation" to look outside itself for answers. In a sense, creation is a victim of itself, it is caught in an ongoing cycle of death and decay. Human beings living within creation must see this and realize that there has to be something more than just being a temporary physical cog in the wheel of life. Knowing Christ and being filled with His Spirit gives us freedom and the glorious liberty to be children of the God who *created* creation, and thus allows us a freedom that goes beyond it. As the Spirit inspired Paul to write, Paul pictured creation as though it were a woman in the pangs of childbirth. The baby she was attempting to have represents all of God's children. As creation groaned, individual Christians also feel the pain, as we see the future benefits of being adopted by God. In the meantime, however, we groan within ourselves as the battle within and without continues. Someday our bodies will be set free. That which the world sees as a tragic end, God's children see as the ultimate liberation of our body and soul. Once separated from our flesh, our

souls will be given spiritual bodies that will no longer bind us to this decaying world and the flesh. At that point, our “groanings” will cease!

With this hope within us, mankind looks beyond this world, placing our hopes in that which we cannot see with our physical eyes. It is this fact that drives our hope and our perseverance to endure the hardships and the sufferings we experience in this life. By God’s grace, we are also blessed by His Spirit as we come face to face with our own weaknesses in times of trial. In fact, at times we are under such duress that we even may find it difficult to pray. In this Paul is not really speaking of *how* to pray, but in even knowing *what* we should pray about. It is at those times the Holy Spirit serves as our go-between, helping our feeble and sometimes-unfocused prayers to reach the Father with “groanings” that human being are unable to speak. This is indeed a mystery, but fortunately for us, God knows the mind of the Holy Spirit, and is able to receive the prayers which the Spirit has re-constructed for us!

It is in this context that perhaps one of the most loved and well-known verses in the Bible is found. “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” Note that this verse does not say that all things that happen to man are good. Nor does this verse say that all things work together for good for everyone. It is for those who love God that this promise is made. Certainly not everything that happens to us here on earth is good. If we love God, however, all things can *work together* for good if we don’t lose sight of Him!

Now we come to the question of “who are the called?” Verse 29 tells us they are those whom God foreknew. This should come as no surprise to us. If God is all-knowing, why would He not know in advance who would accept and hear His call? We must understand, however, that this fact does not in any way override man’s freewill. In fact, it is the exercise of man’s freewill that determines who has heard, and who will hear His call. Our response to God’s call is that which God foreknows, and based upon what He foreknows God has already put into place a planned destination for His people! Thus Paul employs the often-misunderstood word “predestined.” Those who hear God and accept His grace and His Spirit are those who will enjoy the benefits of being conformed to the image of God’s Son. This was God’s plan from the beginning. In fact, He pre-destined this to happen. Our willingness to submit to His plan made it happen in our lives. Justification and glory are in store for those who hear His call. God made plans for our salvation before we were even born!

**:31-39** Armed and protected with such assurances, Paul now asks yet another self-answering question; “If God is for us, who can be against us?” If God is so much in “our corner” as to not even think about sparing His own Son for our salvation, how could we ever refuse Him? As a man pardoned by the king, how could any mere citizen bring a charge against that man? God is the One who justifies, who are we to condemn those whom He has forgiven? This point also applies to ourselves. Just as we have no right or place to condemn one who has turned to God for forgiveness, in the same vein we have no right to condemn *ourselves* once we have accepted God’s saving grace. Once we have God’s Son making intercession for us, nothing outside our own hearts can separate us from His love. Think of the worst things that can happen to mankind upon this earth, and even then you come away with nothing that has the power (against our will) to separate us from God’s love. Summoning a quote from the Psalms, Paul continues to emphasize his point. With God for us, with Jesus’ love bathing us in His peace, and with the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within us, we are conquerors! Nothing in this life or beyond can change that fact. Nothing on this world, under it, or above it, can break the bond between the saved and the Savior. Nothing in creation can separate us from the love of God. If we never turn away from Him, we have the unconditional guarantee that He will never turn away from us!

## Chapter 9

**:1-5** Before making a very emotional statement, Paul first reassures his readers of the truthfulness of what he is about to say, and that his conscience was bearing witness through the Holy Spirit of his sincerity. His statement was this; his sorrow over his own “kin” (the Jews) was so intense that he could *wish for his own soul to be lost*, if such an arrangement could save them. Some may at first discount this statement as an exaggeration, but keep in mind that Paul is not saying that he *was going* to make this offer, nor that he honestly thought such an offer would do any good for his Jewish kinsmen. From an emotional point of view, however, this was how he expressed *how much he wanted* to see the rest of God’s people to accept Christ. Unlike Moses who did make such a proposition to God (Exodus 32:32), Paul understood God’s grace far too well to sincerely believe that his feeble works could pay for even his own sins, let alone others! Showing his deep respect for the people of his heritage, Paul expresses his deep love and concern for their souls, the people from whom “*according to the flesh, Christ came.*”

**:6-13** Paul now puts into words what perhaps many of his Jewish brothers may have been wondering. “Seeing that there are so many Jews who have not accepted Christ, why has God’s Word and His plan had no effect?” In simpler terms, why didn’t God’s original plan work?

Paul begins his answer by first pointing out that even under the old covenant, that not all who were Israelites were really “Israelites” in God’s sight, that is, not everyone who was born a Jew was truly a “Jew.” To further clarify this point, he goes back to the beginning of the Jewish family tree. Although Abraham was the “father of the Jews,” even back then we find that *not all* of his descendents became the children of Israel. It was only through Abraham’s son Isaac that God’s people descended. Later, when Isaac and Rebecca were expecting twins (even before they were born) God told them which son would become the bloodline for the Israelites. Rather than the firstborn son Esau, it was the younger twin (Jacob) whom God later named “Israel.” Paul presses his point yet further by reminding his Jewish readers of the fact that this decision to choose Jacob over Esau was made long before either one of them had had a chance to do anything *good or evil*.

A casual reading of this passage may shake one’s belief in God’s justice and fairness. Is Paul saying that God just randomly chooses whom He wants to bless or reject, and that there is nothing man can do about it? There are those who hold to such a view of God, and have taken much of their “proof” from this section of scriptures. Although an isolated reading of these verses alone could appear to support such a doctrine, we must see the big picture of Paul’s reasoning. At the same time, we must not forget clear Bible teaching found elsewhere in the Scriptures that will help bring a clear and balanced understanding of the subject of “election.”

**:14-29** In verse 14 Paul now addresses this obvious question. “Is God being unrighteous or unfair by making such decisions about individuals, even before their birth?” Paul begins his answer by referring back to a conversation God once had with Moses, in which God stated; “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy (Exodus 33:19).*” Simply put, God has the divine right to have mercy on anyone He chooses to have mercy upon. Man has no right or control over God’s sovereign will. In the final analysis, it will be God who decides who receives mercy, and who does not. Man will not make that decision for God. Nor will man’s works be the basis of God’s decision. For this the reader should be grateful, for if man’s works were the basis for receiving mercy, all men would be lost!

Again quoting from Exodus Paul reminds his readers of what God once said about the Pharaoh in the days of Moses (Exodus 9:16). Note that this passage does *not* say that Pharaoh

was *born* for the purpose of showing God's power, but that God *raised Pharaoh up* (to the throne) for this purpose. Knowing the kind of man Pharaoh would be, God placed him in this position, that someday Pharaoh's stubborn rejection of God would become the ultimate object lesson of human rebellion against the unstoppable force of God's will. By firmly and consistently applying more and more pressure against the stubborn will of Pharaoh, God "hardened" him to the point that Pharaoh destroyed his army and left Egypt devastated. One can only wonder how long it took for Egypt to regain what it lost during Pharaoh's contest of will with the God of Israel. Yet armed only with human pride, he persisted until it cost him his own son, and everything he valued in life.

Here again Paul asks and answers the next obvious question. That question may be worded like this; "How can God find fault with us, if His will cannot be defeated?" Paul begins his answer by first stating that man has no right to even question God about this. To illustrate his point, Paul compares the relationship between God and man to the "relationship" between a potter and a lump of clay. Seeing that He is the Potter, does He not have the right to make whatever kind of vessel he wants out of that clay? Even more, doesn't God have the right to show His power over people who are deserving of being destroyed? Yet often throughout human history God has demonstrated His patience for such people, showing the depths of His mercy. Paul considered himself and his fellow Christians as being among those whom God had chosen to shower His mercies upon. Quoting from Hosea 2:23, Paul reminds his readers of God's promise to call and to claim as "His people" those who had not been known as "His people" previously. Fortunately for all of mankind, this promise has been fulfilled to all who hear His call, both Jew and Gentile. Paul also quotes from Isaiah, who spoke concerning the Jews, that though their numbers were as the sands of the sea, only a small remnant would be saved. Just as the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed, if it were not for God's mercy, all of the descendants of Israel would have faced the same loss. With this in mind, man has no right to complain about God's decisions or judgments.

**:30-33** Paul now returns to his central thought. Righteousness is not something that man can claim through his own law keeping. Even God's chosen people, (the Jews), could not attain it in this way. Through faith in Christ, righteousness is available to all. Ironically Gentiles were finding God's righteousness in greater numbers than Jews, simply because they did not trust in themselves. They, rather, were trusting in that Stone that had been placed as a foundation in Zion. It was the same Stone many of the Jews had found to be a stumbling stone, yet for those who were able to believe in Him, He became their foundation of salvation.

Keep in mind that in the bigger picture, Paul is not diminishing the importance of man's will, nor is he implying that our works are of no importance. If that was truly his point in this chapter, how could it be reconciled to many other statements found in Romans? Even a brief scan of this epistle reveals many passages in which Paul is commanding and urging the church to submit to God's will. (See Romans 1:23-30, 2:21-23, 6:1-6, 7:23-24, 12:1-2, 12:9-18, 13:1, 13:8-14, 14:1-6, 15:1.) The will of man and the works of man are important. In the final judgment, however, it will be God's will that condemns or saves us.

## Chapter 10

**:1-13** Paul begins this chapter by re-emphasizing his love for his fellow Jews, just as he had in chapter 9. His heart's desire and his prayers were filled with his concern for their salvation. Paul could see, unfortunately, that his Jewish kinsmen were a people that were very zealous for God, but that their zeal was misguided. Ironically, Paul knew that these very people that prided themselves upon their knowledge of God's Word, were actually *very ignorant* of its key principle, that being how to acquire God's righteousness. Somehow, in their great fervor to learn and to keep God's Word, the Jews had lost sight of the central message of His Word. Now Paul saw the Jews trying to ineffectually stand upon their own "righteousness" rather than the righteousness of God. As a result, they had made themselves unable to submit to God's righteousness! Human pride is a deep mystery. Here we find the Jews, (like millions today), wanting desperately to be found *right* in God's sight, yet in their zeal they had managed to shut and lock the only door that could lead to it. Trusting in their *own righteousness*, they had displaced and rejected God's righteousness made available through Jesus. To correct their error, Paul now makes it clear that human works are not the "end of the law," rather it is Jesus who "*is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*"

Certainly any God-fearing Jew knew the words found in Leviticus 18:5, in which Moses writes, "*The man who does those things shall live by them.*" Note, however, that Moses was not teaching the concept of "self-righteousness through law-keeping." He was speaking about the importance of keeping God's laws, and that by keeping those laws God's people could live and prosper. Yet Paul (being led by the Holy Spirit) now uses other passages from the Old Testament to emphasize the importance of faith. Loosely quoting from Deuteronomy 30:12-14, Paul gives new meaning to these ancient statements. Simply put, Paul interprets these quotes to say that no man or woman with true faith would ever ask; "*who will go up to heaven to bring Christ down,*" nor would they ask; "*who will go down into the deep to raise Him to life?*" If one truly has faith in Jesus, he would not need to do either, for his faith in God would lead him to say; "Jesus is Lord," believing with great confidence that God "raised Him from the dead." This is the basis of salvation and righteousness. It is upon our faith in Jesus as both our resurrected Savior and as Lord of our lives, that man can and will be made righteous in God's sight. Such faith puts God's living Word even closer to our hearts than any *self-trusting* Jew who may have memorized large portions of scripture. For in placing our full trust in His saving grace, His Word actually dwells within our souls and sustains us, rather than just residing in our memory banks!

The beauty of finding one's righteousness in Jesus Christ (and not in ourselves) is the lifting effect such faith will have upon us. Such faith will immediately begin to produce works of faith rather than works motivated by "self-righteousness." One of the most immediate effects of true faith is sincere confession. The type of confession being discussed in verses 9-10 is that which consists of confessing one's faith in Jesus. One who truly believes in Jesus should have no reservations with allowing such words to flow from his mouth. Believing in your heart and confessing with your lips your confidence in the Deity and resurrection of Jesus is as natural to faith as breathing is to the physical body. With the heart one believes, and with the mouth confession of one's faith in Jesus Christ is made. This is one of the clearest passages in the New Testament concerning the necessity of confession for salvation. This is not to say that by confessing one's faith in Jesus man *earns* his own righteousness, (as the Jews had sought to do), but that verbal confession of our faith is the *natural result* of having a true faith in Christ's power to save. "*Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*" is a statement that should bring all believers much comfort. At the same time, the reader must also exercise caution in

making any passage by itself into a law unto itself. Other passages can be found that speak of the necessity of repentance, baptism, and even charity, in fulfilling man's quest for righteousness. Faith certainly must be the foundation of all human effort. Confession of one's faith can't help but follow true faith. For those who possess such faith, however, other great works will follow.

**:14-21** Paul now takes a step backward as he contemplates how faith is developed. As has been his practice throughout this book, he again asks some rhetorical questions. "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And; "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And finally "How shall they hear without a preacher?" The obvious answer to all 3 questions is simply this; they cannot call, believe, or hear without someone first telling them the good news. Although Paul uses the term "preacher" in verse 14, certainly his meaning here is not restricted to just the formal, professional meaning that this term usually conveys today. Paul is not implying that one must have access to a full time evangelist in order to hear the gospel, but rather he is stressing the importance of someone fulfilling the role of a "preacher" for his friends, neighbors, and loved ones to hear the good news for the first time. His quote from the Old Testament fits well with this thought, as Isaiah once proclaimed; "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace...(Isaiah 52:7)*" Every Christian should take comfort from this verse as we consider how God sees the preciousness of every effort we make to share His grace with others. Sadly, not everyone has or will respond in faith to the great efforts of others to share His love. Even the great Messianic chapter (Isaiah 53) begins upon that note. Yet such rejection should not dampen the resolve of all Christians to proclaim His Word. Received or not, all God's people must remember "*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

With a flurry of quotes from the Old Testament, Paul continues his letter to the Romans. A quote from Psalms 19:4 speaks of "*their sound going out to all the earth.*" Looking back to the context of this quote, one finds that it is the *heavens* and His *creation* that is "speaking" forth His handiwork. As already discussed in Romans 1:20, in a sense even nature proclaims God's greatness and His Word! Regrettably Israel did not always "listen" to nature or to God's revealed Word, forcing God to eventually discipline them as a nation by other nations that never knew Him. Happily, however, Paul could say that many men and women outside of Israel had turned to the One True God. Isaiah is quoted saying; "*I was found by those who did not seek Me.*" Conveying the sense of heartbreak and loss, God pours out His unrequited love to Israel; "*All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.*"

Yet, as we will again be reminded in the next chapter, by reaching out to the Gentiles, God has not given up on the Jews. God's love for them could not be dissolved. As the Lord's servant, Paul was not turning his back upon them. There is room in God's heart for all that truly seek Him!

## Chapter 11

**:1-10** Although God's people had been disobedient and contrary to Him, God was still not willing to "cast away" His people. His desire for them to know the truth and to find salvation remained intact. Paul himself was a Jew, and he sees himself as a clear example of God's undying love for His people. The reason God had not given up on the Jews was simply because God knew ahead of time that there would be some Jews who would accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. To illustrate this point, Paul refers back to the time of Elijah, when this great prophet had reached the point of despair concerning God's people. Yet at that moment God knew even then that there were still 7,000 Israelites who had not bowed their knees to Baal! Because of God's foreknowledge, both then now, God continues to extend His grace to both the Gentiles and the Jews. Just as there was a "remnant" of the Jews who remained faithful to God and who were permitted to return to their homeland after Babylonian captivity, so was there to be a remnant of Jews who would find and accept God's grace under the new covenant. Seeing that both their "election" and ours is by grace, Paul reiterates the fact that receiving such grace is just that; it is not earned by man's works. If man could earn the right to be "chosen" by God based upon his works, then such an election would not be by grace.

Just as Paul has tussled with this point in previous chapters, he again returns to re-emphasize the fact that, in the final analysis, man's election cannot be based upon his works. Yet, one may note that just a few verses earlier Paul had used the Old Testament illustration of those in the days of Elijah who had "not bowed the knee to Baal." This certainly would lead one to think that God recognized their works and that the obedience of these 7,000 faithful Israelites was what made them different from the rest in God's sight. We must conclude, therefore, that Paul's point is not to take away from the importance of man's works, but rather to emphasize the point that if it were not for God's grace, even such "remnants" could not be saved. Certainly the refusal of the 7,000 to worship Baal was clear indication to God of their true desire to stay faithful to Him. God knows every good work and every sincere effort to please Him. While one's good works do not *merit or pay* for God's grace, (if so grace would no longer be grace), man's works *do show to God those who truly seek and want His grace*. Sadly, out of the many people God originally chose to be His people, only a small number really found their way into a true relationship with God. Those who did not seek God's grace were in the end found to be "hardened" or "blinded" by it. It is an unexpected consequence, but for people who are very proud of their own achievements and who have a great deal of self-trust, the application of God's grace does not produce salvation. Rather than salvation, the end result for such people is that they become *hardened* against God's favor. Just as Isaiah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier, there were those whom God would eventually have to give over to a "*spirit of stupor*." The Jews who did not want to see Jesus as the Messiah would eventually render themselves incapable of seeing Him as Lord. King David spoke in similar terms in Psalm 69:22 of those who let "*their eyes be darkened, that they may not see*."

**:11-24** Again, lest his readers get the wrong impression, Paul makes it clear that all hope was not lost for the Jews. Although many of them had failed to understand the gospel, and although many of them just did not "get" the concept of God's grace, their failure to understand had led to the gospel now going out to the Gentiles. Now that the Gentiles had begun to receive it, some of the Jews had now begun (out of jealousy at first) to show a greater interest in what the Gentiles had been so eager to accept. The end result is that the early rejection of the gospel by many of God's people had led to many accepting the gospel, both Jews and Gentiles. The even happier result is that now that many more Jews were accepting the Good News, this in turn was leading

to even more Gentiles being encouraged to serve Christ. One can sense Paul's glee as he sees the chain reaction of "all things working together for good" among those who loved the Lord in his day. It was like Israel had been brought back from the dead, as he saw many of his kinsmen accepting God's grace, while joining hands with those who had once been seen as their enemies, the Gentiles. Together God was making the "whole lump of dough" holy. Using yet another metaphor, together both Jews and Gentiles were now being *grafted together* into the same olive tree. Paul also notes that that olive tree received all of its nutrition from the same root. Although the Gentiles were branches that were taken from a wild olive tree, they had now been grafted into a domesticated olive tree along with the Jews. During the process, some of the original branches of the domesticated tree had been cut off because they were not productive. Although the Gentiles could rejoice in the fact that they had been grafted in, Paul now issues a warning to the Gentiles; "*Don't think being grafted in makes you better than the branches that you have replaced.*" "*Remember you are not supporting the tree, it is the root that is keeping you alive.*" It is a warning that is timeless and for all people, "*Consider the goodness and the severity of God.*" Forgetting either aspect of God will result in our being cut off, just like the branches of an olive tree. They must either produce or eventually face the reality of being pruned!

**:25-36** Throughout this epistle, and especially in this chapter, Paul has sought to strike a balance between both Jew and Gentile. As he offers hope to one, he issues a challenge to the other. As he pronounces a warning to one, he extends words of exhortation to the other. In these remaining verses Paul's concern is that the Gentiles not become arrogant in their opinion of the Jews, especially in regard to those Jews who had become "hardened" or "blinded" to God's grace. Although this response of many of the Jews had led to the gospel more quickly being taken to the Gentiles, Paul now speaks of "the fullness of the Gentiles coming in." With these words Paul indicates that as more of the Gentiles became Christians, the gospel message would continue on, spilling back over to those to whom it was first given. Although there had been times where the Jews had been treated as outsiders for the sake of the Gentiles, Paul again re-emphasizes the fact that having been God's people in the past, God still wanted them to be His again. As the Gentiles had been shown mercy, so the Jews would also be shown mercy! In verse 32 it is said "*God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.*" The message here is that God at different times has seen both Jew and Gentiles as outsiders or disobedient, but in so doing God is also able to them show them mercy. The Gentiles were once outside looking in, and now the Jews were. Fortunately for both, God still has enough mercy and grace to go around!

Paul's remaining thoughts in this chapter are purely his amazement at the riches of God's wisdom, God's knowledge, and how far beyond our understanding are God's judgments and His ways. To quote loosely from Isaiah, "*Who has known the mind of the Lord?*" To God be the glory forever.

## Chapter 12

**:1-2** Paul's efforts in the previous chapter were to assure both Jews and Gentiles alike in their hope of being a part of God's elect. His other goal was to motivate both Jews and Gentiles to truly behave like God's people, rather than just being His people in name only. It is upon this basis that Paul now pleads with the church at Rome to completely and wholly present their bodies as a living sacrifices to God. We must understand this familiar verse first from a Jewish perspective. Consider those of Jewish background who had grown up with the family practice of taking an unblemished animal from their flock, cutting its throat, and then sacrificing it upon an altar to God. This was the concept; any animal sacrifice was first brought to the Lord alive, and then put to death. Seeing that Christ (at the time of Paul's writing this epistle) had already died for the sins of the world, such animal sacrifices were no longer necessary. The ultimate sacrifice that had replaced all animal sacrifices had at last taken place. But now Paul is calling for a new type of sacrifice. Rather than killing an *animal*, this sacrifice involved *human* life. And rather than this sacrifice *ending* a life, it involved the dedication of a life to God's service as a *living* sacrifice! The question is, "How is this to be done?" Paul's summary statement is simple, by not being *conformed* to this world, but rather by being *transformed* from it. Christians don't go with the flow, but rather they strive to go against the current whenever and wherever this world dictates that which is opposed to God's will. Such a transformation does not take place without effort, however. It begins with a *renewing of the mind*. It is an obvious yet profound truth; all great change in our lives begins with a change in our *thinking*. As one's way of thinking begins to take on new parameters and ideals, one's life begins to follow. Even our habits, our likes, and our dislikes slowly but surely begin to fall more and more into line with what our minds are set upon. This is the way that all Christians are urged to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

**:3-8** Paul now issues a warning concerning self-pride. In our zeal to become "living sacrifices" for God, each Christian must also be aware of the danger of becoming self-trusting, thinking much too highly of himself. Although it is good to have confidence in our God-given talents and gifts, we must all see ourselves as parts of the whole, rather than an island unto ourselves. Those who think too highly of themselves are those who have forgotten that they are a piece in the puzzle, rather than the entire picture! Paul reminds the church at Rome that not only are individual Christians members of the whole church, they are also members of *one another*. Seeing themselves in this light, Paul's goal was for each member to then see his or her gifts and talents as existing for the benefit of the whole, rather than those unique gifts being for the glory of the individual. Paul gives some examples of those different gifts such as; prophesy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. (Some of these gifts are no longer given to Christians today, but were given at the beginning of the establishment of the church.) Yet the principles of this passage are clear, and are still important for today's Christian to understand. Whatever gift / talent one may have, we must use it for all that it is worth that God may be glorified, and that the church (as a whole) may be blessed.

**:9-21** Continuing his point, Paul urges his readers that if one is going to love, let it be true love, a love without hypocrisy. Sadly, however, many Christians have what may pass for love, but when push comes to shove, even the slightest difficulty arising between two Christians may turn what once appeared to be love into hideous hypocrisy. If a Christian really wants to be a "living sacrifice" for God, then it is time he starts living it! It's time to really start detesting what is evil and bad in this world, while clinging desperately to what is good. Kindness and affection for our brothers and sisters in Christ is one solid place to start. Having a diligent and fervent spirit is not

something that can be manufactured. It seems that all these qualities that Paul is urging the Romans to develop rise or fall together. Learning to love and to be kind to our brothers and sisters in Christ helps us to develop diligence. Learning simply to rejoice in the hope that we have as Christians helps us to have patience. Learning to have patience helps us to endure trials and tribulations. Keeping our hearts bowed in prayer helps us to become compassionate and giving to those in need.

As all these virtues grow and develop together in the Christian heart, the mature child of God will eventually become able to even bless those who persecute them. The growing Christian will ultimately become capable of always rejoicing with those who rejoice, and also able to weep with those who weep. The mature Christian will become like-minded with other Christians, never becoming proud or wise in his own opinion. Perhaps the greatest test and proof of Christian adulthood, is the day he grows beyond the human tendency to repay evil for evil. Having a respect and a loving regard for all men, (despite all the evil they have done to you), is a true indication that a man or a woman who claims to be a Christian has truly reached a level of spiritual growth that separates him or her from the world. This then can become the basis of living at peace with all men. Note, however, Paul includes the qualifier, "if it is possible." There are those with whom it is not possible to live at peace. Peace is a two-way proposition. Our goal, according to this passage, is to always be the one ready and willing to uphold our side of the peace process.

In this we must take refuge; if there are those who refuse to make peace regardless of our efforts to do so, God will avenge. Vengeance belongs to God, and He will repay to those who's sole intent has been to hurt us and to be everything but godly in their dealings with us. With these thoughts in mind, Paul's final injunction in this chapter may be easily misunderstood. Quoting from Proverbs 25:21-22, the thought may be interpreted in this manner; "if your enemy needs food or drink, give it to him! By doing this you will increase his punishment in the judgment." Certainly Paul's readers must understand that this was not intended to be the *motivation* for doing good to our enemies! This Proverb, rather, is offered as further details of how God's vengeance will be carried out for those who refuse to respond to a Christian trying to bring about peace. Paul's main point is summed up in verse 21. To paraphrase, he says this; "Just don't allow yourself to become overcome by evil. Instead, overcome evil with goodness!" Truly no greater words of advice and wisdom can be found. Think of all the stress and mental pain most people have brought upon themselves by trying to "settle the score" with those who have done them wrong. Even Christians often may be tempted to righteously bring about justice in an unjust situation, and have become very frustrated by evil individuals. Often, justice can run beyond our reach. It is in such ways that Christians must heed Paul's warning. Don't become overcome by evil, get back to your "home base" of love. Love is what has saved you, and love is what has brought you this far. Don't abandon love just because some other human being who don't have it in his life (and who may not even understand it) is trying to hurt you. Your God hasn't changed, this is reality, and this is the world calling, not heaven. Go back to your source of strength, and you will survive with the one thing you can have for all of eternity, and that is God's love!

### Chapter 13

**:1-7** In the previous chapter Paul had focused upon Christian behavior. His point was to show that becoming “living sacrifices” involves more than just talk. Paul makes it clear that behaving like Christians in our interpersonal relationships with both Christians and non-Christians is part of the defining characteristics of being a Christian. As difficult as those instructions must have been for the Roman church to follow, Paul now gives them an even greater challenge. It is here that he confronts the early church with this daunting task; “*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.*” Keep in mind that Paul was writing to a congregation that found itself in the middle of the capital city of one of the most powerful and ruthless empires to ever exist upon this earth. In addition, we must also consider that it was the power of Rome that had our Lord put to death, and that had already begun to persecute Christianity in many subtle (and often not so subtle) ways. As we have set the date of this letter to the Romans at about 56-57 A.D. (see the introduction), we must conclude that the infamous emperor Nero was now at the helm of the “governing authority” under which the church at Rome is being told to submit. Within just a few short years, (in 64 A.D.) the city of Rome would burn. Nero (who it is believed to have had the fire set so that he could rebuild Rome to his tastes) would place the blame for the fire solely upon the Christians in the city. This became his excuse for beginning an extreme wave of persecution against them in which many Christians were executed in Nero’s gardens. It is also believed that it was during this period of persecutions that Paul and Peter were martyred.

With all these historical facts in mind, one might ask; “How could Paul tell the church at Rome to be subject to Rome, with Nero sitting on the throne?” We may begin to answer this question by pointing out the simple fact that Jesus never intended His kingdom (the church) to become an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). Seeing that it was not of this earth, following Paul’s command to submit to whatever earthly kingdom under which the church lived was a very important part of it not being perceived as a rival to earthly kingdoms. Not only did this help the church to keep focused upon its main purpose of spreading the gospel, it also helped the civil government to not become additionally threatened. Keep in mind that despite the teachings of Jesus and Paul concerning this, the church still faced several hundred years of persecution from the “governing authorities” under which the church was born. While we cannot know for certain, we may only speculate what the outcome might have been for the church had they taken a militant stand against Rome, calling on all Christians to revolt in opposition to Nero. We must also consider how much of an affect the “law-abiding” nature of those early Christians had upon the average Roman citizens. Rather than Christians being the threat that Nero and many of his successors tried to paint, the average Roman saw the church submitting to the laws of Rome. These facts are bourn out by the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Christianity, not the Roman government, ended up winning the hearts and minds of the Roman Empire.

Despite the wisdom of such principles, we must still ask how a predominately evil empire such as Rome could be *appointed by God*. This is not an easy passage to understand. We may begin by pointing out that any government established by human beings will be far less than perfect. This was indeed the reason God never wanted His people to have an earthly king, but rather wanted them to live directly under His rule. When the Israelites persisted, God let them have their way, while also warning them of the unpleasant things that would come with having a king. He forewarned them of such things as taxes and the forced enlistment of their sons for war, just to name a few. In summary, we see that we now live under the New Covenant, and that the gospel has now extended to both Jews and Gentiles. Man’s opportunity to live without a civil government is now no longer an option. That “experiment” so to speak was demonstrated under the old law, and even God’s chosen people were not content with it. As a result, God’s people

now find themselves under various forms of human government. For Christians to fight against the consequences of man's rebellion from God's direct rule is to fight against the ordinance of God. Man must have some kind of social order. If we will not allow God to lead us with a perfect government, we must therefore allow human beings to keep us in order in a less than perfect manner.

Verse 3 is perhaps the most difficult of all. "*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.*" Certainly any reader from any century (especially the 1<sup>st</sup>) could think of examples where human governments *had* been contrary to good works. We can be certain that God knew what the Roman government had done, and what it was about to do to Christianity. Killing innocent people for sport because of their faith in Jesus Christ was and is evil to the core. With this in mind, we must conclude that this is not what Paul was saying. The point of this passage is that in a functioning, stable governmental system, those who obey the laws of that government can live in peace, without being afraid of the authorities. This is a general rule regardless of what type of government we live under. There are, however, what would appear to be exceptions to this rule, as Christians suffered horribly under Roman persecution. Yet we must note that as Roman leaders began to forsake their own laws with such mistreatment of Christians, their grasp and control of their empire began to weaken. History has shown that any nation that fails to protect and respect its citizens will eventually fall. In the meantime, however, it is the responsibility of those Christians living within that nation to do their best in keeping those laws of that nation. Certainly Paul is not suggesting that Christians should obey any *ungodly* laws that our government may decree. Such an interpretation would fly in the face of such great examples as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (see Daniel 3 & 6), as well as Peter & John (Acts 4:19)! Short of disobeying God, however, Christians must obey their governments, even to the point of paying taxes. This is not to say that Christians may not seek *legal* means to avoid paying excess taxes, or that Christians may not personally choose to be involved or even elected to governmental positions.

**:8-10** Besides not owing the government, Christians must also determine to "*owe no man.*" That which we do owe to our fellowman, however, is to treat all men and women with love. Just as Jesus had taught, Paul reiterates that true love for our fellowman is a part of our fulfillment of the law. In repeating 5 of the 10 commandments, Paul sums up the fact that all of these laws were based upon love. If we truly love our fellowman, we would not even attempt to commit adultery, murder, steal, lie, or envy. Love does no harm to a stranger!

**:11-14** Paul's words convey his sense of urgency. It's time to awake out of sleep! The end is nearer than when we first believed! Paul always wrote with the expectation of Jesus' return being near at hand. Although neither he nor any other man knew or knows when Jesus shall return, to expect Him at any time is certainly much better than the opposite. Such urgency most certainly drove Paul on to his many journeys, as he sought to save as many as he could before the day of Christ's return. His plea was for the church at Rome to come out of darkness and to walk properly. Apparently, both then and now, the problem of wild, uncontrolled living affected some within the church. Based upon all that has been said in this chapter alone, one can conclude that there were some church members who were railing against the government, mistreating their neighbors, and just generally wanting to take matters into their own hands at the slightest provocation. Paul, through the Holy Spirit, now pleads for those Christians at Rome to set the standard for Christian behavior in the capital city. Apparently many of them listened. In the years to come, the congregation at Rome became known for their good works throughout the Roman world.

## Chapter 14

**:1-13** One facet of brotherly love that is often forgotten is now addressed. How should Christians handle the issue of having brothers and sisters in Christ who may have scruples concerning religious “issues” that are matters of opinion? Basically Paul is now dealing with how Christians interact with other Christians in regard to trivial matters that really don’t matter to God. His first example is that of the issue of eating meat. This was apparently a current issue of debate in the early church. Those who did not believe in eating meat probably did not do so out of concern that much of the meat for sale in the open market had at some point been offered to idols as a sacrifice. There may have also been some of very strict sects who believed that it was wrong in general to eat flesh, as is the belief of some vegetarians today. Paul’s point in this passage is not to condemn such beliefs, nor is it his goal to endorse them. Rather, Paul’s point is that neither position is a matter of salvation, and therefore should not be a matter of judgment on our part. Paul does state, however, that it is the “*one who is weak who eats only vegetables.*” In his view, therefore, it is one who’s conscience is bothered by the possibility that the meat on the dinner table been offered to an idol is the one whose faith is not mature enough to see that idols had no power over them. Although it is clear that Paul saw no sin in eating meat, his point was to refrain from judging and condemning those Christians who still had a problem with it. (See Paul’s comments on this very subject in his letter to the Corinthians, where he takes these thoughts even further I Cor.8:1-13 /10:14-33).

As a further illustration, Paul also now discusses the observance of days. This reference was to those who still held to the observance of Jewish religious holidays. Considering that the gospel went first to the Jews, we must understand that the early church was made up of people who had grown up with these observances. It is unrealistic to think that they all were able to immediately cease all such traditions. As before, keep in mind that Paul is not arguing the merits of keeping these holy days, nor is he saying that such Jewish holidays must still be observed. However, Paul is warning the church at Rome to not make such matters a test of fellowship! Whether one observes the Passover or ignores it is not the issue. Paul’s concern was that the church could learn to accept each other’s differences in these matters of opinion so that they could continue to work together as one. This is the real issue; can the church, made up of many different individuals with many different opinions and scruples, truly work together as an integrated unit? As both ancient and recent church history reveals, this has been the challenge for Christianity. Unfortunately, throughout the 20 centuries since Paul wrote these words, the church has (for the most part) failed to find a way to bridge these differences. Paul’s point was this, however, *if each child of God focused all of their energy toward being able to give an account of themselves to God rather than judging their brother*, we just may be able to help one another. Rather than putting a stumbling block in our brother or sister’s path, we may actually help them find their way to heaven.

The reader should keep in mind that Paul is not implying that all matters of difference and doctrine are in this category of “*doubtful disputations.*” Paul himself took very strong stands at many different times and places. The key to this passage is to make sure that those issues upon which one stands are truly supported by Biblical teachings. If not, we must recognize that they are a matter of opinion or tradition, and not something to be bound upon ourselves or our brethren. This is not always easy, and should be an ongoing effort of every Christian.

In addition, we may also find examples where Paul stood strong against *matters of tradition* when those traditions were being taught as *requirements* for salvation. For example, it is one thing to avoid eating meat in front of a brother or sister whose conscience is offended by

such eating, but it is another thing entirely for a weak brother or sister to *enforce* such dietary laws upon his fellow Christians as a *requirement* for their salvation. This is not what Paul was teaching, and is clearly demonstrated by his response to those who wanted to have Titus (a Gentile) circumcised. Paul refused, for to do so would be the beginning of making circumcision a *requirement* for salvation under the New Covenant (See Gal.2:1-6). If the stronger brethren in any congregation were to allow such human laws or traditions to be forced upon the church, it would have the chilling effect of elevating the traditions of man, giving them equal importance to God's oracles. In time, the entire church would become hamstrung and bound by the *combined scruples* of all the weakest brethren in the church. Once the entire congregation submits to the concept of allowing the weak to legislate for the strong, our freedoms in Christ would gradually erode. Strict dietary laws, dress codes, individual observance of special days, hair styles, and even certain vocabulary controls could quickly become a part of the church "rules." This was never Paul's point, and his thoughts in this chapter must not be interpreted to support this concept.

**:14-23** Unlike the attitude of Cain, in many ways we as Christians are "*our brother's keeper.*" Even though we may be enlightened to the point that we can see that there is nothing ceremonially unclean about any kind of food we may choose to eat, we must consider our brother or sister who may be distressed by the food that we are eating in their presence. Paul's point was that if we are hurting our brother spiritually by our eating habits, we are not walking in love. Are we willing to destroy a fellow Christian over food? Keep in mind that Paul is not talking about giving up eating food altogether, rather he is speaking of refraining from eating certain foods in the presence of a weaker brother. Besides the eating of meats in general, the issue of eating certain meats (such as pork) that were forbidden under the Jewish Old Testament dietary laws must have also come into consideration at this time as well. Paul's point was that having peace with our brethren as we strive to build up one another is much more important than always having our way. We can run roughshod over everyone else's feelings, or we can start thinking about the long-term spiritual ramifications of our actions. People who seem to enjoy forcing their freedoms upon others are not really showing the love of Christ in their actions. In fact, Paul is saying that such behavior is evil. Why drink and serve wine and meat to a brother who would be offended and made weak by this? Is this the way to help him grow? In most cases, it will only drive that brother further away from the truth. Paul's statement in verses 22-23 is very simple. If we have faith and a clear conscience concerning our beliefs and our practices, that is a blessing. It is wonderful to be able to live at peace with our beliefs, and to not feel condemned by the things that we approve of and do. However, not everyone has reached that point. If one has doubts about doing something, and he goes ahead and does it, he is not acting according to his faith. He or she must first come to peace with a better understanding of God's Word before changing their behavior in that matter. Those who do or say things that they are not at peace with are actually sinning. God knows the heart, and if we are doing what we *think* is against Him (even if He has not ruled upon this matter) we are transgressing against Him *in our minds*. Those who willingly go against God's teachings are sinners, and so are those who willingly go against what they *think* is God's teachings. As a general rule, those who would do such things will also violate the clear commandments that He has given us.

## Chapter 15

**:1-6** Paul again turns his attention to the responsibilities that go along with being a stronger and more mature Christian. Those who see themselves as being strong in the faith should be both willing and able to help bear some of burdens of their weaker brethren. Rather than seeking to always please themselves, Christian maturity demands that one looks beyond himself, thinking first of the problems his weaker brother or sister may be encountering in their Christian walk. Jesus Himself first set this example, as He bore the reproach of the world for the sake of all who accept His gift. Quoting Psalm 69:9, Paul interprets and applies this passage to Christ's sacrifice. In the same way, we as Christians are asked to learn how to give and to be flexible in the face of weaker brethren who may not yet have reached our level of understanding.

Verse 4 is often quoted to state the value of the entire Old Testament for the New Testament Christian. However in this context the specific application is this; by reading and understanding the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Christ, one can better learn how to become patient with others, following in the footsteps of our Savior. Supplied with His patience, the Christian who is well read in the entire history of God's plan for redeeming man can develop the proper attitudes toward those who are weak in the faith. Paul demonstrates and summarizes this attitude with a written prayer; *"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus."* If every congregation of the Lord's church could completely and lovingly apply these principles, most division and factions could be prevented.

As previously discussed, these principles work only when it is the stronger Christian who *willingly submits* his freedoms for the sake of the weak. Sadly, many see this passage as giving the authority to those who are weak, forcing their opinions upon the entire congregation. As a result, many congregations have become paralyzed in an effort to continuously appease the weakest and most immature members. When the stronger, more mature members become ruled by those who have many unbiblical scruples and human traditions, the very basis of Paul's points in chapters 14-15 are missed. Paul's instructions were to the *strong* (verse 1). Those who would demand that others submit to their unsupported traditions are putting themselves in the role of the weak, even though they may think of themselves as being strong. Paul's comment would be; "If you think you are so strong, then start submitting your traditions for the sake of your brethren, don't go on trying to make them submit to you!" Unfortunately, most of us want the prestige of being the *strong*, while having the benefits of being the *weak*. We can't have it both ways.

**:7-13** It is easy to forget that one of the ways Christians can honor God is by honoring our brothers and sisters in Christ. Just as Christ has accepted and honored us by allowing us to be a part of His church, we must honor one another with that same respect. Jesus came to this earth with a servant's heart, appealing first to God's people, the Jews. He then extended that same love to the Gentiles. Several passages from the Old Testament are quoted to confirm this fact. Either II Samuel 22:50 or Psalm 18:49 can be considered the source of Paul's first quote (:9). His next quote (:10) is from Deuteronomy 32:43, and the following (:11) is from Psalm 117:1. The 4<sup>th</sup> quote (:12) is taken from Isaiah 11:1. All four quotes speak of God's blessings extending to the Gentile nations. Through the "root of Jesse" One would come who would reign over the Gentiles. Again, as Paul begins to draw this great epistle to a close, he writes his prayer for the church at Rome. *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

**:14-21** Paul now expresses his confidence in his brethren at Rome. He was convinced of their goodness and knowledge, and also of their ability to teach and build each other up. Even so,

(Paul continues), he felt it necessary to speak to them boldly and plainly about many things in this letter. God had given Paul a great responsibility in being His minister to the Gentiles. As such, Paul did not want to make the mistake of taking any part of obedience for granted, even when speaking to a congregation such as Rome, where both Jews and Gentiles were doing great things together in the name of Christ. By God's power Paul had been able to not only teach, but also to confirm the good news through great miracles and wonders worked by the power of the Holy Spirit. Being led by the Spirit of God, Paul's basic practice had been to preach and to go to those places where no other Christian evangelists had gone before. Paul made it his goal to lay foundations himself, rather than to build upon someone else's foundations. He says this not out of pride, but rather out of a strong motivation to fulfill the prophecies of such passages as Isaiah 52:15, in which it is stated that *"those who haven't been told about Him will see Him, and that those who haven't heard about Him will understand."*

**:22-33** Paul wanted the church at Rome to understand that even though he had wanted to visit them for many years, up to this point he had been hindered due to his other obligations. Now that some of his more pressing work had been accomplished, his plan was to stop by Rome on his way to Spain. This insight into Paul's plans is very interesting. Later we find that Paul did indeed get to visit Rome, but under quite different circumstances. Following his arrest and his appeal to Caesar, Paul ended up visiting the capital city at Rome's expense as a Roman prisoner (Acts 25:12)! Church historians indicate that Paul was released after his journey to Rome, but was later again arrested and eventually beheaded in that city. It is not known for certain if Paul was ever able to reach Spain, although there are some historical indications that he did so prior to his final trip to Rome.

As mentioned in the introduction of this commentary, it is believed that Paul wrote this letter to Rome during his 3-month stay in Greece (Acts 20:3). Before heading to Rome or Spain, however, Paul's plan was to first go to Jerusalem to deliver a collection of funds that he had gathered from various congregations in Macedonia, Achaia, and Galatia. The book of Acts records the fact that Paul did indeed journey to Jerusalem, and was able to briefly meet with some of the brethren there before his arrest (Acts 21:15-36). Although not mentioned, we can conclude that the collection of funds had been delivered to the church leaders in Jerusalem before Paul's arrest. In these final verses of the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans Paul speaks of the gratitude the various "Gentile" congregations had for their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. In Paul's words, the Gentile Christians saw themselves as *debtors* to their Jewish brothers and sisters, because it was through the Jews that the gospel had first been delivered. Paul shares this information with the church at Rome as an encouragement to the brethren in Rome to have the same heart and attitude. Paul clearly anticipated that the Roman church, (even though he had never been there), would treat him with the same kindness that he had found in other congregations where he had many close ties. At the same time, Paul also knew that clouds were beginning to gather over his trip to Judea (Acts 20:23). It must have been an unbearable time of internal conflict for Paul, for as he had these very important goals to fulfill, he was also being warned by the Holy Spirit of the "chains and tribulations" that awaited him in Jerusalem. Still, he hoped against hope that somehow he would be afforded the freedom to continue on his one-man mission to change the world for Christ. Considering the fact that the apostle Paul had already survived an actual stoning and numerous attempts upon his life, it is no surprise that he had such confidence in his plan.

## Chapter 16

**:1-2** As Paul begins to bring his historic letter to a close, he specifically mentions many individuals that were known to both him and the congregation at Rome. The first to be mentioned is Phoebe, whom he refers to as a “servant of the church in Cenchrea.” Cenchrea was a harbor just east of Corinth. Paul had passed through Corinth on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. Much has been made of Paul’s description of Phoebe. Some believe this to be a scriptural example of a female servant or deaconess. While it is true that the Greek word translated “servant” in this verse is same Greek word translated as “deacon” in I Timothy 3:8-13, one should not jump to the conclusion that the formal office or position of deacon is being referred to in reference to Phoebe. In fact, the same Greek term is also translated many times in reference to “servants” and “ministers.” Certainly men and women both need to be in the Lord’s service. However, the use of this term does not automatically imply that anyone and everyone who serves the Lord is also functioning and is recognized as holding the position of a “deacon” in the church. If so, one would have to say that if everyone in a congregation is serving God, the entire church would therefore be deacons in this specific sense. The explicit qualities of the “office” of a deacon are given in I Timothy, and seeing that one of those qualities mentioned is that of being the “husband of one wife,” we must conclude therefore that Pheobe was not holding the position of a deacon in the church, but rather that this term is being used in the broader sense in Romans 16:1. She was a servant of the Lord, as all Christians should seek to be. She apparently was also a woman of means, and perhaps had helped support Paul and many others in their ministry. Furthermore, it is believed that Phoebe was the one who delivered this letter to the church at Rome.

**:3-16** Paul’s next personal note is toward Priscilla and Aquila, a husband and wife team that he had met in Corinth, and whom were now apparently in Rome. As Paul is writing this letter from Corinth, we can understand how his thoughts now turned to this wonderful couple that had (at some point in time) risked their lives for Paul, perhaps in Corinth or Ephesus. Now they were in Rome, where a group of Christians were already meeting in their home. Was this the congregation at Rome to which this letter was sent, or was it yet another group? To attempt to answer this, we must understand that the church in any area at that time would have been less consolidated and organized as we know congregations to be today. Rather than having a central church building, it appears that at this early date the church would have been made up of many smaller groups that met in homes, and even many less visible locations as the Roman government became more hostile to Christianity. From the way Paul words this, however, one would tend to think that the group that was meeting in Priscilla and Aquila’s home was not the larger group to which the letter was originally addressed. It may have been yet another home church that this great evangelistic team had started, perhaps in another part of that large city.

Paul also greets Epaenetus, a man who Paul calls the “firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” The more accurate translation is “Asia” rather than “Achaia.” We know nothing further about this individual, but his presence in Rome indicates that yet another of the early disciples was in the capital at this time. Paul also speaks of a “Mary” of whom we have no further knowledge. There is no reason to identify her with any of the other women mentioned in the gospels of that name. He also speaks of two of his kinsmen, Andronicus and Junia, men with whom Paul had apparently spent some time in prison, obviously due to their common faith in Christ. It is interesting to note that Paul mentions their faith as predating his own. The list continues as Paul sends his greetings to Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, and Apelles. We know nothing further about them, but it is said that these were common slave names. We know nothing further about

Aristobulus, In verse 11 Paul lists another relative by the name of Herodion, and also the household of Narcissus. No definite identification of these two individuals can be made. Tryphena and Tryphosa were female names, perhaps even sisters, who had worked hard for the cause of Christ. Another lady who had also played an important role was Persis. Certainly Paul had a high respect for both the men and the women of the early church who dedicated their lives to the cause. As with many previously discussed from this list, Rufus is named but not clearly identified. Apparently Paul was so close to him, he also claimed Rufus' mother as his own as well! The list of Paul's acquaintances and loved ones in Rome continues with the names of Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and Olympas. Although each of these names meant a great deal to Paul and were apparently known to the members of the church at Rome, it should be obvious to today's reader that this is simply a loving personal closing to Paul's letter.

Following these personal greetings Paul very naturally states; "*Greet one another with a holy kiss* the churches of Christ greet you." Much has been said and written about the significance of the *holy kiss*, with some seeing this as a command that must be observed, on an equal plain with other Bible commands. Good Bible interpretation does not support such an interpretation. Paul's words here at the close of his letter are equivalent to incidental comments we say and write to one another daily. "Greet each other with a holy kiss" is comparable to today's such common closing comments as; "give your family our love" or "tell your parents I said hi." A common kiss upon the cheek was (and still is in some parts of the world) simply a way of expressing brotherly love to one another. Certainly the principle is binding, as many ways of expressing brotherly love are taught throughout the Bible. However, to attempt to bind this simple statement upon the church in a place or time in which such a kiss would not be construed as holy, is using poor interpretation skills!

**:17-20** Some closing words of caution are in order. Paul pleads with the church at Rome to not only note (keep track of) those who cause divisions in the church, but also to avoid them. While other passages can be found in the New Testament that speak of church discipline, Paul makes a specific effort to remind the church at Rome about such issues that may arise. He specifically mentions those who were very good with words, and who seemed good at making people think they were Christians, when in reality they only really cared about filling their stomachs and satisfying their fleshly desires. Paul was proud of the church at Rome's good reputation. He didn't want to see them blindsided by Satan working from within. He wanted to see evil crushed by the power of Christ working through the church.

**:21-24** At this point Paul lists some of those who were working with him in Corinth, and who also sent their greetings to the church at Rome. Timothy is mentioned first. Paul's letters to him show the importance of Timothy to Paul. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater were all Paul's relatives. Although some have attempted to further identify them, no definitive confirmation can be made. Paul does allow Tertius to identify himself as the scribe to whom Paul had dictated this letter.

**25-27** Paul ends his letter with words of praise. God will make you strong with His gospel. It's the completely good news that had not been revealed for centuries, and now it is known. It's that great news that the prophets had written about, and had told the world was coming. Now that it is here, it is available for all nations to obey and to have faith. Because of Jesus, we can praise the only true and living God forever and ever. These were Paul's closing thoughts that he wished to convey to the church at Rome. By God's grace we too have had the honor of reading them and growing in our faith through His Son.

-Bruce Gleim 04/20/07  
Vandalia Church of Christ