

The message of

Romans

Leaders Guide



The righteous will live by faith.

Romans 1:17

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Other religions are about being saved through giving *to* God a righteousness. Christianity is about being saved through receiving *from* God a righteousness.

“The subject then of these chapters may be stated thus — that man’s only righteousness is through the mercy of God in Christ which being offered by the gospel is apprehended by faith.”

– John Calvin

The purpose of Romans

Paul wishes to have his readers first understand and then *experience* the gospel, to know its glorious release. Martin Luther explains how he came to know it the first time:

I labored and diligently and anxiously as to how to understand Paul’s word [in Romans 1:17], where he says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. I sought long and knocked anxiously for the expression “the righteousness of God” blocked the way, because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

...Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise... When I saw the difference, that law is one thing and gospel another, I broke through. And as I had formerly hated the expression “the righteousness of God”, I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word. So that this expression of Paul’s became to me in very truth a gate of paradise.

...If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God for faith leads you I and opens up God’s heart and will that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but only looks upon a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.

Those who read the letter to the Romans today must ask themselves: “Have I, like Luther, ‘broken through’ into the freedom and release that the gospel brings? Or has it not really penetrated me? Are things ‘blocking’ it up, as it was with Luther at first?”

Ground rules for the group

Mention these the first week and refer to them briefly thereafter when needed.

1. Look to the Bible for the answers to the questions. Don't try to read the leader's mind.
2. Stick to the chapter under consideration. Don't skip around or cross reference unless it is very necessary. Skipping around can make less experienced students feel ignorant. (But it is good to refer back to other portions of the book that the group has studied).
3. Try to cover the whole passage chosen.
4. No question should be treated as foolish or insignificant by the group. However, the leader has the right to decide if the question or comment is taking the discussion off the subject.

System for the leader***Background Information***

Often it is helpful to provide background information. This should be facts which the group probably does not have access to but which will help them understand the passage better.

Questions should go in cycles.

A. **Launching** questions are the main questions that get the group into the text. In the leaders notes, these are the questions that are laid out and are underlined. Earlier launching questions in the discussion should be "observation" questions (what does it say?), later ones should be "interpretation" questions (what does it mean?), and last ones should be "application" questions (what does it mean to us?). For example:

Observation question: "What does Paul say are the results of God's wrath?"

Interpretation question: "Why does this paragraph follow that one? What is Paul trying to say?"

Application question: "How would we live differently if we were to take this seriously?"

B. **Guiding** questions are follow-up questions and responses by the leader that keep the group digging for more truth along the lines of a launching question. Many launching questions are not very open ended and have one real answer — in such cases you may follow up with few or no guiding questions. Other launching questions need several guiding questions. For example:

“OK, but what does that mean?”

“What does anyone else see?” “What do the rest of you think?” “Are there any other ways to answer that?” “Is there anything else?” “OK! What else?”

Be careful not to phrase a guiding question in such a way as to make the previous speaker think you were unappreciative of his or her comment.

C. A **summarizing** question is necessary with an open-ended launching questions that elicited a number of responses. Then move to another launching question. For example:

“OK, could someone summarize what we’ve learned here?” “Could anyone put this in your own words?” OR, if the point has been hard and no one has really spoken well to it, you may summarize it and polish it yourself. But incorporate what has been said!

Notes on the notes

Often I put a question in parentheses — this can be used as an alternate question if the first one does not seem to get a good response, or they can be used as a guiding questions to get the group digging more to get answers.

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Romans

Introducing the Gospel

Study 1 | Romans 1:1-17

Summary:

I: vv.1-7 - Paul's life-work revolves around the gospel.

- v.1 The gospel is what Paul's whole life is about.
- v.2 The gospel is what the whole Bible (OT) is about
- vv.3-4 The gospel is about Jesus, the God-man
- vv.5-6 The gospel leads to obedience through faith
- v.7 Greetings!

II: vv.8-15 - Paul's goal is to preach the gospel at Rome.

- vv.8-10 Paul wants to come to Rome
- vv.11-15 Though they are Christians, Paul expects to bless them by preaching the gospel to them too

III: vv.16-17 - Paul's thesis: the gospel in a nutshell

Characteristics of the gospel

- v.16a The gospel destroys shame (its effect)
- v.16b The gospel is a living force (its power)
- v.16c The gospel can save anyone at all (its scope)
- v.16d The gospel saves only those believing (its condition)
- v.16d The gospel came to the Jew first, then the Gentile (its history)

Content of the gospel

- v.17a God provides a perfect righteousness and record for us.
- v.17b It is received by faith permanently and exclusively
- v.17c The result of reception is a new way of life.

Part I: vv.1-7

1. (vv.1, 6) What is the passion and ultimate goal of Paul's life?

(v.6) Paul has received "grace and apostleship" (i.e., both his job, *apostleship*, and power to accomplish it, *grace*). The goal of his life is to bring "about among the Gentiles... the obedience that comes *from faith*." Paul is going to the pagan Gentiles and seeking to have them obey God, but it is an obedience that springs from faith. What that means is unfolded throughout the whole book, but it is an obedient heart and life that comes from knowing we are accepted and righteous in God's eyes through our faith in Christ. (v.1) Paul was "set apart" for the gospel's spread. The word means "to separate," to move away and apart from everything else for the pursuit of some one

thing. This means that the gospel is something so great that he is willing to separate himself from *anything* (wealth, health, acclaim, friends, safety, etc.) in order to be faithful to it.

Sum: Paul's goal in life is to see the pagan nations know the obedience to God that springs from an embrace of the gospel. Paul is prepared to lose anything to see that accomplished.

2. (vv.1-6) What do we learn about the content of this gospel from the first 6 verses? (i.e. what do we learn about what the message is?)

v.2 Its origin. The gospel is not a new thing, but the Old Testament was all about it ("the gospel... which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures").

vv.3-4 Its subject. The gospel centers on Jesus. It is about *him*, not *us*. It is "the gospel concerning his Son." We learn that Jesus is both human ("who was descended from David according to the flesh") and divine ("declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection").

vv.5-6 Its result. The gospel, when embraced by faith, somehow causes an obedience to God ("the obedience that comes from faith").

Part II: vv.8-15

3. (vv.8-15) What is the immediate goal of Paul?

(vv.8-10) He has heard a lot about the Roman church, though he has never been there. They are constantly on his mind. (v.11) He wants to come to Rome in person and use his spiritual gifts ("impart to you some spiritual gift") which means he wants to use his abilities of preaching and pastoring to see them grow in the fruit of the spirit. (And he expects to be built up in his faith.)

Part III: vv.16-17

4. (v.16) Why does Paul refer to being not ashamed (i.e. offended) by the gospel? In what ways can the gospel offend or be despised?

a) The gospel, by telling us that our salvation is free and not earned, is really insulting. It tells us that we are such spiritual failures, that the only way to salvation is for it to be a complete gift. This offends moral and religious persons who think their decency gives them an advantage over less moral people.

b) The gospel, by telling us Jesus died for us, is also really insulting. It tells us that we are so wicked that only the death of the Son of God could save us. This offends the modern cult of self-expression and the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity.

- c) The gospel, by telling us that “trying to be good and spiritual isn’t enough” insists then that not any good person, but only those who come to God through Jesus will be saved. This offends the modern notion that any nice person anywhere can find God “in his own way.” We don’t like losing our autonomy.
- d) The gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus’ suffering and serving (not conquering and destroying), and that following him means to suffer and serve with him. This offends people who want salvation to be an easy life; this offends people who want their lives to be safe and comfortable.

5. (v.16) What does Paul mean when he calls the gospel “the power of God?” In what ways is it powerful?

Paul is often fond of contrasting “mere” words with power (see I Cor.4:20). Paul is saying that the gospel is not *merely* a concept or a philosophy. In the gospel, words and power come together. But the very message of the gospel is what God has done and will do *for us*. And Paul says that therefore the gospel, appropriately, is a power. He doesn’t say it brings power or has power, but that it actually is power. The gospel message is actually the power of God in verbal, cognitive form. It lifts people up; it transforms and changes things. When it is articulated or reflected upon, the power is released.

Theodoret likened the gospel to a pepper. “A pepper outwardly seems cold to the senses, but the person who crunches it between his teeth experiences the sensation of burning fire.” In the same way, he goes on, the gospel can appear at first like an interesting theory or philosophy. But if we take it in personally, we find it full of power.

It is the power of God “unto *salvation*.” The gospel’s power is seen in its ability to completely change minds, hearts, the orientation of our whole lives, the way we understand and comprehend everything that happens, the way people relate to one another, and so on. But most of all, it is powerful because it does what no other power on earth can do — it can save us, reconcile us to God, and guarantee us a place in the kingdom of God forever.

6. (v.16) What releases the power of the gospel into our lives? (What is the qualification for it?)

The power of God brings salvation to everyone who believes. Here we have the first explicit statement that the only way to receive the gospel and its power is through faith. Faith is thus the channel or connection to the power of the gospel, like a light switch is the channel or connection between the light and the electrical source. Paul immediately tells us that the gospel’s power is both boundless and boundaried at the same time. He says it is to *everyone*. The gospel is offered to everyone. It came to the Jew first, through Jesus, but it is for the Gentile first — everyone and anyone. (cf. v.14 – it is for the *wise* as well as the *foolish* — everyone). Yet he also sets a limit on it. It is for everyone *who believes*.

7. (v.17) What is the righteousness spoken of here? (And how is this different from merely being forgiven?)

You can get a pretty good handle on “righteousness” by thinking of the English word — what does it mean to be “right” with your company or your government or with another person? It is a *positional* word — it means to have a good or “right standing,” to have no debts or liabilities toward the other party. It means that you are *acceptable* to the other party because your record has nothing on it to jeopardize your relationship. The other party has nothing against you, etc.

The righteousness *of* God would mean the character of God as righteous, i.e. as perfectly holy and good, without any fault or blame. But Paul speaks of a righteousness *from* God. This is an unparalleled claim (as the word *revealed* shows — no one would ever know of it or find it or guess it unless God showed it through his word). It means this “right standing” with God is something that can be received from God. It means that an intact righteous standing is received from God when we believe in all he has done for us.

It is quite important to realize how much more is being promised here than mere forgiveness.

1. Many people think Jesus died merely to forgive us. Our sins were laid on him, and when we believe in him, we are pardoned. That is true, but that is only half of Christian salvation. If that were all he did, we would then receive a new “wiped clean” slate.
2. But here Paul tells us that we are not just declared “not guilty” but “perfectly righteous.” How this happens will be revealed later in the book.

THIS IS A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF BOTH A) NATURAL TENDENCY OF THE HUMAN HEART AND B) THE UNIVERSAL THRUST OF ALL OTHER RELIGIONS. EVERYONE ELSE THINKS OF SALVATION AS PROVIDING A RIGHTEOUSNESS TO GOD, WHILE THE GOSPEL SAYS SALVATION IS RECEIVING A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD.

8. (v.17) What does it mean to “live” by this righteousness of faith? (In what ways is the gospel the ongoing power in the Christian life?)

There are innumerable responses and illustrations that your people can provide to this question. But the basic gist of an answer goes like this:

At the root of each and every sin, and each and every problem is unbelief and rejection of the gospel. People who are immoral and people who are moral both reject the gospel when they try to be their own savior.

1. When licentious people reject religion and God, their rebellion is really a refusal to believe the gospel — that they are so sinful only Jesus can be their saviour.

2. When moralistic people pick up religion and morality and become either anxious (because they are aware they can never live up to standards) or proud (because they think they have), their anxiety and/or pride is really a refusal to believe the gospel — that they are so sinful only Jesus can be their saviour.
3. When Christian people sin, it is always a forgetting that they cannot save themselves, only Jesus can.

When bitter, it is because we have forgotten that we are already totally saved by grace alone — so how can we withhold grace? When we are overworking out of fear of failure, or depressed because we have failed, it is because we have forgotten that we cannot earn our own righteousness, that in God's eyes we are righteous. (Let people think about how other sins are rooted in a desire to be our own savior and to forget that he is our only saviour and righteousness).

TEACHING A

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Overview of the Gospel

PART I. SHORT DEFINITIONS OF THE GOSPEL

Martin Luther

“Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours.”

John Calvin

“...a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous.”

Heidelberg Catechism

Q. 60: How are you right with God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

Q. 61: Why do you say that by faith alone you are right with God?

A. It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ’s satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God. And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.

Q. 62: Why can’t the good we do make us right with God, or at least help make us right with him?

A. Because the righteousness which can pass God’s scrutiny must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to divine law. Even the very best we do in this life is imperfect and stained with sin.

Q. 64: But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No. It is impossible for those grafted into Christ by true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude.

Redeemer teaching

Tertullian said that, just as our Lord was crucified between two thieves, so is this great doctrine crucified continually between two opposite heresies. The gospel keeps two truths together.

1. God is **holy** so our sins require that we be punished.

The gospel tells us: "You are more sinful than you ever dared believe."

To forget this leads to license, permissiveness.

2. God is **gracious** so in Christ are sins are dealt with

The gospel tells us: "You are more accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope."

To forget this leads to legalism, moralism.

Thus a Christian is, to use Luther's phrase, *simul iustus et peccator* — "simultaneously justified and sinful."

If you eliminate one or the other of these truths, you fall into legalism or license and you eliminate the joy and the "release" of the gospel. Without a knowledge of our extreme sin, the payment of the gospel seems trivial and does not electrify or transform. But without a knowledge of Christ's completely satisfying life and death, the knowledge of sin would crush us or move us to deny and repress it.

PART II. EXPLANATIONS OF THE GOSPEL***Martin Luther's Commentary on the Galatians:***

(abridgment, paraphrase, and amplification of "The Argument of the Epistle" from the Introduction)

Paul sets down the Biblical teachings so that we can know, without a doubt, the difference between *Christian* righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness.

1. There is a political or civil righteousness. This is what world leaders, diplomats, civic leaders and lawyers must teach.
2. There is a "social" righteousness, which is acting, speaking, dressing, and carrying oneself correctly according to the traditions and mores of a particular culture or vocation or field. This is what parents and families and schools teach.
3. There is moral righteousness, "the righteousness of law" that comes from obeying the Ten Commandments. This the church teaches (but only in light of the "Christian" righteousness, below).

There are other types:

4. The righteousness that comes from relationships — becoming attractive and loved by people of both sexes.
5. The righteousness that comes from career achievement — becoming successful or respected or monied through your talent and work.]

There is another, a far better righteousness, which Paul calls “the righteousness of faith” — Christian righteousness. This one we must distinguish from the rest because it works in a completely different way from the others. The other kinds of righteousness we can work at ourselves, by our own strength. But this Christian righteousness is the greatest of all. God puts it on us without our lifting a finger. It has nothing to do with our obeying God’s law; it has nothing to do with what we do or how hard we work, but it is given to us and we do *nothing* for it. It is a *passive* righteousness, while the others we have to work for. (It is *perfect* righteousness, because it is the perfect record of all Christ did in living and dying, while the other kinds are partial and imperfect.) And it is *free* righteousness, for we don’t do anything or give anything to God to get it, but we *receive* it, because someone else has done all the work for it in our place. Therefore it is “passive” righteousness.

This passive righteousness is a mystery that someone who doesn’t know Jesus can’t understand. As a matter of fact, Christians never *completely* understand it themselves, and do not take advantage of it when they are tried and tempted. So we have to constantly teach it to others over and over and we must repeat it to ourselves. For anyone who does not understand this righteousness and fails to cherish it in the heart, will continually be buffeted by fears and depression. Nothing gives peace like this passive righteousness.

For human beings by nature, when they get near danger or death, do not see anything by what they have *done* to be righteous, how worthy we have made ourselves; we defend ourselves by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of our sins and flaws comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think: “How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend things.” But the *real* evil here is that we are obsessed with our own power to be righteous, and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done *for* us, to prepare a righteousness to be received. So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of *grace*, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ. This is passive righteousness.

When a person finally realizes this, there is peace and he or she says: “Even if I could work 10 times better at righteousness starting today, it could not atone for my past wrongs nor could it make me perfect before the judge. So I cast away, not my efforts to be good, but my *trust* in those efforts before the Father and before my conscience. Instead, I trust in the righteousness of Christ *ONLY* to please the Father, and the Law, and the conscience.” It is like this: the earth does not produce rain, nor is it able by its own power or work to get it. The earth simply receives the rain as a gift of God from above. It is the same with Christian righteousness. It is given to us by God without our deserving it or working for it.

It is an absolute “strange” and unique teaching, unknown in the world, to teach people, through Christ, to live as if there were no Law or Wrath or Punishment, but only total grace and mercy for Christ’s sake! Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life; it shows you how God wants you to live. But until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is to show you how sinful you are. When you really see what it teaches, you will only be terrified, seeing that you could never satisfy it. It reveals your pride and self-centeredness and selfishness and lack of self-control.

Therefore, a faithful communicator of God’s Word will give out the law so it is kept in perspective. If the law is pressed on people’s consciences, giving them the impression that they must obey it to win God’s favor, then Christian righteousness becomes mixed up with earned/moral righteousness in the people’s minds. Instead the Law must be taught ***clearly, to see the futility of satisfying it, of meriting God’s favor and love through it.*** Then a person must have the “law and works” taken out of his sight and be shown the gospel, Christian righteousness.

No one should think we reject the importance of good works, and obeying the Law. Return to our earlier illustration. Just as the earth does not bear fruit until it receives the rain from heaven as a gift, so when we receive the Christian righteousness, we consequently can live a good life, naturally, out of gratitude. If we try to earn our righteousness by *doing* many good deeds, we actually do nothing. We neither please God through our works-righteousness *nor* do we honor the purpose for which the law was given. But if we first receive Christian righteousness, then we can use the law, *not* for our salvation, but for his honor and glory, and to lovingly show our gratitude.

So, have we nothing to *do* to obtain this righteousness? No, nothing at all! For Christian righteousness comes when we know and believe this only — that Christ is gone to the Father, and sits at his right hand, not as our judge, but that Christ has now *become FOR us*, our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our salvation. God sees no sin in us, for in this heavenly righteousness sin has no place... So now we may certainly think: “Although I still sin, I don’t despair, because Christ lives, who is both my righteousness and my eternal life.” In that righteousness I have no sin, no fear, no guilty conscience, no fear of death. I am indeed a sinner in this life of mine and in my own righteousness, but I have another life, another righteousness above this life, which is in Christ, the Son of God, who knows no sin or death, but is eternal righteousness and eternal life.

Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter [of Galatians] to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness that is so great. For if the truth of being *justified by Christ alone* (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build yourself on the work of Christ you must build your life on your own work and effort. On this truth and *only on this truth the church is built and has its being.* ***Now if we cannot see the differences between the two kinds of righteousness, and if we do not take hold of Christ by faith, sitting at the right hand of God (Hebrews 7:25) who pleads our case, sinners that we are, to the Father, then we are under the Law, not under grace, and Christ is no Savior, but a Lawgiver, and is no longer our salvation, but an eternal despair.***

D.M. Lloyd-Jones (“The True Foundation” in Spiritual Depression)

“How then does it work? It works like this. God accepts this righteousness of Christ, this perfect righteousness face to face with the Law which He honoured in every respect. He has kept it and given obedience to it [through his perfect life], and he has borne its penalty [through his death]. The Law is fully satisfied. God’s way of salvation, says Paul, is that. He gives to us the righteousness of Christ. If we have seen our need and go to God and confess it, God will give us his own Son’s righteousness. He imputes Christ’s righteousness to us who believe in Him, and regards us as righteous, and declares and pronounces us to be righteous in Him. That is the way of salvation, the Christian way of salvation...

To make it quite practical let me say that there is a very simple way of testing yourself to know whether you believe that... [After] I have explained the way of justification... to them, then I say: ‘Well, then, you are now ready to say that you are a Christian?’ And they hesitate. And I know they have not understood. Then I say: ‘What is the matter, why are you hesitating?’ And they say: ‘I do not feel that I am good enough.’ At once I know that in a sense I have been wasting my breath. They are still thinking in terms of themselves; their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian, good enough to be accepted with Christ. They have to do it! ‘I am not good enough.’ It sounds very modest, but it is the lie of the devil, it is a denial of the faith...

The essence of the Christian faith is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him!

As long as you go on thinking about yourself and saying: ‘Ah, yes, I would like to, but I am not good enough; I am a sinner, a great sinner,’ you are denying God and you will never be happy. You will continue to be cast down and disquieted. You will think you are better at times and then again you will find that you are not as good as you thought you were... How can I put this plainly? It does not matter if you have almost entered into the depths of hell, if you are guilty of murder as well as every other vile sin, it does not matter from the standpoint of being justified before God. ***You are no more hopeless than the most respectable... person in the world. Do you believe that?***

PART III. EXPERIENCES OF THE GOSPEL

David Brainerd’s Diary

(paraphrased and abridged, from Part I.)

When I was about twenty years of age I was engaged more than ever in the duties of religion. I became strict, and watchful over my thoughts, words, and actions; and thought I must be very seriously religious, because I considered entering the ministry. I spent much time every day reading my Bible and praying, and I gave great attention to Sunday sermons. In short, I had a very good *outside*, and trusted entirely in my religious duties, though I was not then aware of what I was doing wrong.

Though I often confessed to God that I, of course, deserved nothing, yet still I harbored a secret hope of recommending myself to God by all these duties and all this morality. When I prayed affectionately, and felt some melting of my heart in love to him, I hoped God would thereby be moved to care for me. So I thought that through my repenting

and praising him and seeking him, I could make good steps toward heaven. When my heart seemed full of love and faith, I felt that God would be affected by that, and would hear my prayers for their sincerity. In other words, I *healed myself with my duties*. I told myself, "God must accept you, because look at how whole-heartedly you serve and seek him."

Now here was the problem. The more I tried to love God with all my soul, the more I saw how little I really loved him. The more I sought a *soft* heart, the more I felt how *hard* my heart was, and I supposed it must be softened before Christ would accept me. One night I remember in particular, when I was walking alone, and I had opened such a view of my sin that I feared the ground would cleave asunder under my feet and become my grave. I saw it was impossible for me, after the utmost pains, to answer the demands of God's law. I saw it condemned me for selfish and angry and fearful and envious and lustful thoughts, which I could not possibly prevent.

Then, after a considerable time spent in such distresses, one morning I was alone and I saw that all my contrivances and projects to effect or procure salvation were utterly in vain. I had thought many times that the difficulties were *very great*, but now I saw them in a different light — that it was totally impossible to do anything toward delivering myself. The tumult that had been in my mind now quieted. I saw that all my prayers and repentances and feelings and obediences had not laid the least obligation upon God to bestow his salvation on me.

Then I realized *why* they were of no avail. When I had been fasting, praying, obeying, I thought I was aiming at the glory of God, but I was doing it all for my own glory — to feel I was *worthy*. As long as I was doing all this to earn my salvation, I was doing *nothing* for God, all for me! I realized that all my struggling to become worthy was an exercise in *self-worship*. I was actually trying to *avoid* God as saviour, and to be my own saviour. i.e. I was not worshipping him, but using him.

Then, at that time, the true way of salvation opened to my mind. I saw so much of its wisdom and suitableness and excellence that I wondered how I ever was blind to it. I wondered why everyone did not see this way of salvation — not by my own contrivances, *but entirely by the righteousness of Christ*. I felt myself in a new world, and every thing about me appeared with a different aspect from before.

John Bunyan, from *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*

(paraphrased and abridged)

Every little touch would hurt my tender conscience. But one day, as I was passing through a field, suddenly I thought of a sentence, "your righteousness is in heaven," and with the eyes of faith, I saw Christ sitting at God's right hand. And I suddenly realized — THERE is my righteousness. Wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say, "where is your righteousness?" for it was right before him. I saw that my

good frame of heart could not make my righteousness better nor a bad frame of heart make my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

Now my chains fell off indeed! I felt delivered from slavery to guilt and fears. I went home rejoicing for the love and grace of God. Now I could look from myself to him, and I realized that all those weak character qualities in my heart were like the pennies that rich men carry in their pocket, when their gold is safe under lock and key. Christ is my treasure, my righteousness. Now Christ was my wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and salvation.”

Romans

The pagans need the Gospel

Study 2 | Romans 1:18-32

Summary

1:18 – Intro: God's wrath *revealed and deserved*

v.18a Revealed: for the presence of God's wrath in the world *now*

v.18b Deserved: for we know the truth but suppress it so we can live as we wish

1:19-25 – God's wrath deserved – *"without excuse"*

God discloses his glory

v.19 God's existence is plainly disclosed

v.20 God's nature (power and divinity) is revealed in the created order

Humanity rejects true worship and glory

v.21a Refusal to glorify or thank the Creator

v.21b Both true reasoning processes and unconfused emotions are lost

Humanity constructs a counterfeit worship and glory

vv.22-23 Counterfeit religions and ideologies all worship something created

v.24 Counterfeit worship leads to bondage and addiction ("gave them up")

v.25a Counterfeit worship based on believing a particular set of lies

v.25b Sum: if we won't worship the Creator we will worship something created

1:26-32 – God's wrath revealed – *"received... the due penalty"*

v.26a The principle of God's wrath: he gives us up to our false worship

vv.26b-27 The effects of God's wrath on the desires

vv.28-32 The effects of God's wrath on the mind and will

1. (v.18) What does this verse tell us about the wrath of God?

a) Its **existence**. A loving God is also a wrathful God. Some may question how this can be, or say, "I have trouble with this." In this situation, a guiding question can be: **"If you deeply love a person or even a place (like a lake), does that preclude wrath?"** Here is a quote to use:

We tend to be taken aback by the thought that God could be angry. How can a deity who is perfect and loving ever be angry?... We take pride in our tolerance of the excesses of others. So what is God's problem?... But love detests what destroys the beloved. Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys. Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H.Gifford wrote: 'Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the

drunkard, the liar, the traitor.'... Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference... How can a good God forgive bad people without compromising himself? Does he just play fast and loose with the facts? 'Oh, never mind...boys will be boys'. Try telling that to a survivor of the Cambodian 'killing fields' or to someone who lost an entire family in the Holocaust. No. To be truly good one has to be outraged by evil and implacably hostile to injustice.

– Rebecca Pippert, *Hope Has its Reasons*

- b) Its **presence**. It is here working *now* (the present tense "*is revealed*"). There will be much more about *how* it is working today later in the passage.
- c) Its **object**. It is versus "godlessness" (a word which refers to disregard of God's rights) and "wickedness" (which, strictly speaking, is a word which refers to disregard of human rights to love, truth, justice, etc.).
- d) Its **deservedness**. It is versus people who know better, who "suppress the truth." (See the next question.). This important idea of "suppressing the truth" shows that every person "down deep" knows there is a God to whom they owe allegiance. Verse.21 goes so far as to say all human beings, even the pagans "knew God." (This doesn't mean that they had a personal covenant relationship with him, but that their knowledge of God's existence is very real, but repressed.)
- e) It's **the reason we need the gospel**. The NIV translation leaves out the word "for" which (in the Greek) starts the verse. The word connects v.18 with vv.16-17 and shows us that the gospel is necessary not simply to make us happy but because there is such a thing as the wrath of God. All of Paul's confidence and joy and passion for the gospel (1:1-17) rests upon the assumption that all human beings are, apart from the gospel, under the wrath of God. If you don't understand or believe in the wrath of God, the gospel will not thrill, empower, or move you.

Note: Don't let this discussion go on too long. Actually, the main subject of this whole passage is "the wrath of God." But there are other major themes that Paul lays out which must be understood before we can realize either the justice OR the operation of God's wrath in the world today. We return in the final question to ask what we've learned about God's wrath.

2. (vv.18-21) Why does Paul say that all human beings are "without excuse" if they don't seek or serve God?

It is because God has provided in nature numerous clear clues and evidences to his existence and nature. "What may be known about God is plain to them" (v.19) "being understood from what has been made" (v.20).

Don't let them give you just a general answer here. A guiding question: "**What are some of these clear evidences Paul is referring to and how do they make us without excuse?**" This is of course a very big and deep subject! There are many interesting ways to "see the existence of God" in the world around us.

But here is one way to think of it: All science proceeds on the assumption that inorganic life cannot produce organic life. Yet, if there is no personal creator, then life must have happened "by chance." One scientist (not a Christian) said that organic life happening by accident is "as ridiculous and improbable as the proposition that a tornado blowing through a junkyard would assemble a Boeing 747" (Sir Fred Hoyle, *The Intelligent Universe*). He calculated that the chances of organic life happening are one in ten to the power of 40,000. (For organic life to spring from inorganic, 2,000 enzyme molecules would have to have formed simultaneously from 20 component amino acids on a single occasion.

Now many have argued that Hoyle's numbers are too high. But all agree that it's only a chance of "1 in a million" that life originated by accident, without a personal creator. Yet many or most scientists or intellectuals base all their thinking (and their eternal destiny) on this slim chance. Now think. Do rational people operate this way? Would you take all your earthly goods and possessions and bet them on a horse with 1 in 1,000 chance? Would you even bet \$1,000? But why would you do something in thinking about God that you wouldn't do with \$1,000?

This is exactly what Paul referred to when he says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God... but their thinking became futile." To "suppress the truth," they will engage in non sequiturs and non-rational "leaps."

Here also is a fascinating quote that explicates Paul's argument:

"Imagine a person who comes in here tonight and argues 'no air exists' but continues to breathe air while he argues. Now intellectually, atheists continue to breathe — they continue to use reason and draw scientific conclusions [which assumes an orderly universe], to make moral judgments [which assumes absolute values] — but the atheistic view of things would in theory make such 'breathing' impossible. They are breathing God's air all the time they are arguing against him."

– Greg Bahnsen, *Does God Exist: A Debate*

3. (v.20) What is made plain to us about God (and what is not)?

The text (v.20) tells us that God's "eternal power and divine nature" are revealed by nature and thinking about the world. This means that looking at the world should show you: that God exists and should be worshipped ("divine nature") and that there must be a personal creator who brought all this about; and that God is great and worthy of respect ("eternal power") and that whoever created all this must be a being of unimaginable greatness. Notice that we cannot deduce the love and mercy of God from looking at the world! Paul does not say that reasoning and investigation of the world will show us the way of salvation. That can only come through special revelation (Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets — i.e. the Bible).

4. (vv.22-25) What does Paul tell us always happens to human beings who reject worship of the true God?

a) Counterfeit god construction. Paul uses two words: we *worship* and *serve* created things. It means we were created to worship the Creator, so if we reject him we will worship *something* and that which we worship we will serve or have to “obey.” Human beings are goal-oriented. To live in the world, we have to order our lives into priorities and something must have the *highest* priority, that which gives us meaning. Now whatever that is, we “serve.” It becomes the “bottom line,” that which defines and validates all other things we do.

Because God created the world, all created things have some glory in them, of course, so it is possible to find these things admirable. The problem comes from giving any created thing *inordinate* affection — affection that is ultimate, like that which we owe God.

b) Bondage and addiction. Paul says “therefore God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts.” This means that the things we serve will not free us. Rather, they control us. We are “given over to them.” We *have* to have them in order to be happy, to like ourselves, to have meaning in life. And since they do not satisfy (because our hearts were made to center on God, not on any created thing), we always need more and more.

Another great quote:

“Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives.”

– Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*

5. Application: What are some examples of idols? or, How are all problems, personally, politically and socially the result of “worshipping the creature rather than the creator?”

A way to tell what your “idols,” your “functional masters,” are is to ask, “What is my greatest horror? What, if I lose it, would deprive me of a desire to even live? What do I need in order to accept myself?” That is your lord.

Some examples of personal idols:

A. Workaholism. Work becomes the thing you live for — to be productive and useful.

B. Codependent “enabling.” Needing to feel needed is what you live for.

C. Beauty and image. This can have various forms, including eating disorders.

D. Sex and physical gratification. (Paul mentions these in vv.26-27).

E. Romance. This is not the same as pure sexual gratification. You live for crushes or for someone to love you.

F. Perfectionism in general. You live to keep complete control of your life.

G. Materialism. Money and possessions become the salvation and driving force of your life.

Some examples of social/cultural idols:

a) Fascism. Make an idol of one's race or nationality. "I am acceptable because I am an _____" rather than getting identity as a child of God.

b) Communism. Make an idol of the state. Government, not God will solve all problems. Marx said everything is political, and all problems are political/economic ones, rather than spiritual ones.

c) Populism. Making an idol out of public opinion or majority rule, rather than what God says is right.

d) Capitalism. Making an idol out of the market. Like communism, seeing all our problems as economic ones.

e) Rigid multi-culturalism. One's ethnic group or culture is sovereign. No one can criticize it — it is absolute, rather than the Word of God.

f) Enlightenment humanism. Makes an idol of reason and scientific investigation. Science has an answer for everything and reason will open all doors.

Sum: At the root of all problems (personal or social), all non-Christian philosophies and ideologies, is the elevation of some created thing to the place of ultimate worship and ultimate arbiter of truth and meaning.

6. (vv.26-32) What are all the consequences of false worship Paul lists (spiritual, mental, moral, physical)?

These are mainly found in verses 26-32, but some are mentioned earlier in the passage.

Paul is showing us that the effect of this false worship leads to the complete disintegration of human life.

A. Intellectual confusion and frustration — (v.21), "futile reasoning," because to deny the supremacy of the true God requires holding to many non sequiturs and the suppression of truth. See also v.24, "exchanged the truth of God for a lie."

B. Emotional confusion and frustration (v.21), "darkened hearts," because the heart and desires were originally built for God and nothing put on the throne of the heart will satisfy.

C. Bondages and addictions (vv.24, 26 and 28) "gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" because any false god becomes a tyrant which can never be satisfied.

D. Decay of personal and corporate life (vv.29-31) because behavior deteriorates. It leads to:

1. Economic disorder – “greed,”
2. Social disorder – “murder, strife, deceit, malice,”
3. Family breakdown – “they disobey their parents,”
4. Relational breakdown – “gossips, slanderers, insolent, arrogant and boastful,”
5. Character breakdown – “senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”

Note: It is quite possible that the group will want to talk about vv.26-27 which sees homosexuality as a sexual bondage that flows out of idolatry. You should know:

1. This is the longest passage in the Bible on homosexuality.
2. This calls homosexuality “against nature” (*para phusin*). This means it is a violation of the nature God gave us.
3. This says homosexuality comes from worshipping the creature rather than the creator. Now we have seen that *every* problem comes from idolatry of some kind — so homosexuality isn’t the only one! But Paul may be saying that homosexuality comes from the idolizing of same-sex love.

7. vv.18-32 Review question: In light of all you have studied, what have you learned about a) how God’s wrath works right now and b) why God’s wrath is fair and just.

God’s wrath *is* revealed now and is the cause of the disintegration we see (v.18). But the justice and operation of his wrath can only be understood by looking at the self-destructive power of evil. Darkened hearts and minds are the direct results of a refusal of the truth (note the connection of vv.21a and 21b). The bondage they experience emotionally is the result of worshipping false gods that cannot satisfy (note the connection of vv.23 and 24). In other words, sin is violating the order God created (e.g. God created us to serve Him; God created us to live unselfish lives; God created us to tell the truth). So when we sin it sets up stresses and strains in the fabric of life that will lead to breakdowns — spiritually, psychologically, socially, physically.

Therefore, God’s wrath and punishment is to simply “give us over” (vv.24a, 26a, 28b) to the things we worship and the things we want. We see both the justice yet terror of God’s wrath. It is just, because “down deep” we know that there is a God (v.20 “without excuse”) and he is only giving us what we want (v.27 “received in themselves the due penalty”). It is terrible, because it means that the worst thing God can do to a human being is to let them reach their idolatrous goals.

Sum: Paul shows us how the world —

A. Rejects the true God. (vv.18-20: It has refused to acknowledge the reality of a Creator God, to whom all worship and service is due, though God has provided in nature numerous clear clues and evidences to his existence and nature.

B. Constructs counterfeit gods. (vv.21-25) Instead, human beings (who need to worship and serve something to have meaning in life), find created objects to worship instead, and construct lives, ideologies, and false philosophies and religions around those deified-created things.

C. Resulting in disintegration of human life. (vv.26-32) There is intellectual, emotional, personal, and social disintegration.

D. And all this is the revelation of God's wrath.

Romans

The religious need the Gospel I

Study 3 | Romans 2:1-16

Summary

2:1-3 – We are judged according to our knowledge (part 1)

- v.1 To judge someone brings a double condemnation (both the judge's and yours) Why?
- v.2 God's judgment is very just
- v.3 We will be judged by the same standards we place on others

2:4-5 – We are judged according to God's patience

- v.4 God never gives us what we deserve, but tries to lead us to repentance through blessing us
- v.5 But God's patience will lead to greater judgment in the end if we reject him

2:6-8 – We are judged according to our works

- v.6 The principle
- v.7 Eternal life comes to those who are glory-seeking
- v.8 Wrath comes to those who are self-seeking

2:9-11 – We are not judged according to our pedigree

- v.9 Trouble to self-seekers regardless of background
- v.10 Honor to glory-seekers regardless of background
- v.11 God is an impartial judge

2:12-16 – We are judged according to our knowledge (part 2)

- vv.12-13 We are judged by God's law only if we have it
- vv.14-15 Those without the law are judged by what they intuitively know of it in the conscience
- v.16 Jesus will be the judge

Background: In 2:17 Paul shows us who he is addressing in all of chapter 2. "...you call yourself a Jew if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God..." He is addressing religious Jews.

1. v.1 – "You therefore, have no excuse" Why does Paul address the religious in Chap 2 right after his denunciations of 1:18-32? How do religious people "miss the gospel?"

In chapter 1, Paul shows how the pagan Gentile world has rejected God and plunged into immorality. Paul's critique of the pagan world and lifestyle would have been roundly supported by any Jewish person listening to him. But they would have thought Paul's condemnation of them was true simply because they were Gentiles. (And consequently,

that they were exempt from his condemnation simply because they were Jews.) Now this is exactly how any religious person would listen to Romans 1 today. They would say, “Yes, of course God’s wrath lies on the immoral, the pagan, the one who lives a life of debauchery. But we have the Word of God and live by that. We are not condemned.” But it is because of the subtlety of sin and of idolatry that religious people can seem to be agreeing with Paul about Romans 1:18-32 and yet be completely deluded!

Thus in chapter 2, Paul shows the Jews (and thus religious people) that they were missing the whole point of the gospel! The heart of the gospel is that “the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (1:17). Paul shows us that everyone runs from it and tries to avoid it. We run from it *whenever we rely on anything or anyone else but Jesus and his perfect, finished work*. The pagans rely on their appetites, which become chains around their neck (1:18-32), but the religious people rely on religion and moral observance, which stores up God’s wrath just as much (2:5). The pagans worship self through appetite, but the religious worship self through morality and religion. There are many ways to rely on (i.e. worship and serve — 1:25) the creature rather than the Creator.

If you are a moral person who is satisfied with your spiritual state, you are denying the doctrine of righteousness through faith only. If you do not feel like a hopeless sinner, if you do not feel that God would have a perfect right to cast you off this minute because of the condition of your life and heart, then you are denying the gospel, and when it is open to you it won’t change you or lift you up. You don’t get it.

2. vv.1-3 What are the consequences of condemning and judging others?

The basic point of these three verses takes some reflection to see. Paul first says that God judges “based on truth.” This probably means he is most fair and just in his judgment — and here is why.

First, we see that no one lives up to his or her own standards. v.1 “*At whatever point you judge the other... you do the same things.*”

So, second, this means the standards we use on others will be *the standards by which we are judged*. “You are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” i.e. Your own mouth and your own standards will be that which condemns you.

Francis Schaeffer used to call Romans 2:1-3, “the invisible tape recorder.” Paul means it is as if there is an invisible tape recorder around the necks of us all. It only records things we say to others about how they ought to live and behave. Then at the last day, God the judge will take the tape recorder off your neck, and say, “I will be completely fair! I will simply judge you on the basis of what your own words on this tape recorder say are the standards for human behavior.” And not a person in history will be able to stand in judgment against his or her own words.

Guiding question: Since Paul himself often criticizes certain behavior and attitudes as sinful, what do you think “passing judgment” or “condemning” really means?

In I Cor 2:15 we are told, “The spiritual man judges all things, but himself is judged of no one.” Here the word means to evaluate and understand. We are told that we should evaluate people and behavior and that we should correct people (Gal.6:1-2). Therefore, Paul means something more drastic. It probably means evaluation/criticism with:

- A. A particular attitude toward *others*. It is a “writing off,” a happy pronouncement of doom — “you are lost and I’m glad.”
- B. A particular attitude toward *yourself*. It is a belief that you are superior, you are worthier. In short, to “pass judgment” *is to believe that others are worthy of judgment but you are not.*

3. vv.4-5 What do these verses teach us about the patience of God?

First, it teaches us that no one will get what we deserve. God the judge *never* judges on time. He never executes as quickly as he has a right to (v.4a).

Second, it teaches us that the most patient and loving thing he can do is to bring us to repentance (v.4b).

Third, it means that the more God gives us truth and good things, the greater our responsibility and the more serious our judgment will be if we don’t repent (v.5). The idea of “storing up wrath for the day of wrath” shows that the longer we get God’s blessings without repenting, the greater the final punishment. The “storing up” may be inspired by the image of a great dam. The longer a dam holds back the flood and protects you, the higher the waters build, so that, when it breaks out, it will be enormous.

Guiding question: How does God’s kindness lead us to repentance? Any personal illustrations?

- A. First, it probably means that simply the fact that judgment is delayed (and the world goes on) is a mercy. It is kind of him to simply give us more time.
- B. Secondly, it may mean that sometimes the irritations and disappointments and even tragedies of our lives may be actual kindnesses, because they lead us to see the truth about our need and condition and lead us to repentance.
- C. Thirdly, it means that the great and good things we receive in life ought to lead us to repentance. How? If when we get a raise, etc. we see it *as what we deserve*, then it will harden us, but if we see *it as kindness, an undeserved mercy*, then it will soften us and move us toward God and a grateful spirit.

4. vv.6-10 What is the general test by which God will judge people at the end? Does this contradict what Paul said about salvation in 1:16-17?

The answer is that the test is “what we have done” (v.6). There is no contradiction. (How do we know? We need to give Paul some credit for intelligence. Only 20 verses ago he said that we are saved apart from the law or anything we can do!) The apparent contradiction falls apart if we remember that Paul is dealing with good works as the test *on the day of judgment*, NOT good works as the *basis for salvation with God*. Here’s another way to put this: The apples on an apple tree *prove* life, but they don’t *provide* life. The apples are the test that the tree is alive, but it is the roots which pull in nourishment. In the same way, faith in Christ alone provides new life (brings it in from God), but a *changed life of righteousness* is what proves we have real faith.

Note: the phrase “eternal life” here is used by Paul to mean the glory that we get on judgment day. Elsewhere we are told that we *have* eternal life (all through the gospel of John, for example).

5. vv.7-8 – What are some of the specific tests that indicate that a heart is right with God or not?

Verse 7 gives tests that indicate a person is right with God:

a) “Persistence in doing good” means that doing good and living good has become a persistent pattern.

b) “Seek glory, honor, and immortality” means that these are qualities that come from life with God. The person who is right with God does not do good deeds for their own sake. He or she wants to become a particular kind of person — one like God.

Verse 8 gives tests that indicate a person is not right w/ God:

a) “Self-seeking” is the tell-tale sign. It means to have a spirit of self-will, or self-glorification. This is something that can be pursued either through being irreligious and licentious, or through being moral and religious and upright.

b) “Reject the truth and follow evil” means that there is an unwillingness to be instructed and to learn from God’s truth. A lack of teachability, a refusal to submit to truth outside of one’s own convictions and heart.

6. vv.12-15 How do people without the law of God still have it written upon their conscience?

Everyone has heard people quarreling... they say things like this: ‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same thing to you?’ ‘Why should you shove in first?’ ‘Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine’... Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other

man's behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some standard of behavior which he expects the other person to know about [intuitively]... I know some people say... different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference... Think of a country where... a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him... This law has been called the Law of Nature because people thought everyone knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it. That does not mean that you might not find an odd person or group that did not know it, just as you find a few who are color-blind or have no ear for a tune... What is the sense in saying the enemy is in the wrong unless Right is a real thing which the Nazis at bottom knew as well as we did and ought to have practiced? If they had had no notion of what we mean by right, then, though we might still have had to fight them, we could no more have blamed them for that than for the color of their hair.

– C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

This quote by Lewis shows that “the golden rule” is something inborn in people. It is the basic principle for not only Biblical social ethics, but for that of other religions. And our convictions (regardless of culture) are based on the idea that the golden rule is not just an idea or a feeling, but is based on something objectively true that all people ought to respect. This is exactly what Paul is telling us about in Romans 2:12-15. All people know the essential principles of right and wrong behavior and that they are based in a objective reality, a standard by which we are to be judged.

7. Application: What practical daily difference could it make to you that there is a judgment day coming? (For example, how could it help you overcome resentment toward a person?)

1. It makes the present crucial. Our works and actions will be evaluated. “Men’s secrets” will be judged. What you do now counts eternally.
2. It makes us very aware of the responsibility of learning God’s Word. Clearly, we are judged on the basis of our knowledge. The more we know, the more we are responsible for. No wonder that the more mature and advanced a Christian is, the more grateful you are for God’s grace and the more of a sinner you feel yourself to be. (In a certain sense, you probably ARE a worse sinner after years in the faith, because you know so much!) It is fatal to ignore God’s truth, but it is dangerous to hear it — and those are the only two alternatives!
3. It helps us overcome bitterness and a condemning spirit. We are not supposed to condemn others. Bitterness is a kind of condemnation that Paul warns us about. We can overcome a grudge by remembering the doctrine of judgment:
 - a. Only God deserves to be the judge, because only he is *righteous*. We ourselves deserve to be judged, since we wronged God. He forgives us in Christ, how can we fail to do the same?

b. Only God deserves to be the judge, because only he is *wise*. God knows exactly what the person knows, and knows how responsible the person is. We do not have that kind of knowledge, and we don't know what he or she really has coming.

c. If God is the judge, we are off the hook. If a person has wronged you, then either he/she will be forgiven through true repentance, or God will give him/her what is just. We don't have to exert ourselves to make the world a just place. God is doing that and will complete that job in the end.

Romans

The religious need the Gospel II

Study 4 | Romans 2:17 - 3:8

Summary

vv.17-24 The failure of moralism

vv.17-20 The confidence of the moralists

v.17a Have his law

v.17b Relationship to God

v.18 Learn and approve his will

vv.19-20 Instruct and teach others in it

vv.21-24 The failure of the moralists

v.21 They steal

v.22a They commit adultery

v.22b They have idols

v.24 Sum: moralism can't fulfill (thus blasphemes) the very law it honors

2:25-29 The failure of religion

v.25 Outward observance without the inward reality is empty

v.26 The inward is what counts

vv.27-29 Sum: religion can't change the heart, which is true spirituality

3:1-8 Answers to objections

v.1 Q: "Paul, are you saying there is no advantage to Biblical religion?"

v.2 A: No, there is great value in having and knowing the Word ("oracles") of God

v.3a Q: "But then the Word failed, for so many of the Jews haven't believed the gospel."

vv.3b-4 A: No — despite their failure to believe, God's promises to save advance. Our faithlessness only reveals how true he is!

v.5 Q: "But if he is faithful in response to our faithlessness, how could he judge anyone?"

vv.6-7 A: He *will* judge unbelief — that *is* being faithful in response to our faithlessness.

v.8 Anyone who says (I don't) that you can sin so God will love you is worthy of that judgment

Introduction for the group: Remember in this whole chapter Paul is addressing the religious Jew, who thought: "I am not like the pagan, I am moral and religious, so I am surely not under God's judgment" (2:3).

1. vv.17-24 List 5-6 things Paul says the Jews of his day were proud of. How do they all boil down to one basic factor? In vv.25-29 Paul names a second basic factor on which the Jews relied — what was it?

vv.17-24. The Jews of Paul's day were proud of:

1. Their nationality — their being Jews (you call yourself a Jew)
2. Their having the law of God (you rely on the law),
3. Their relationship to God as a people (you brag of your relationship to God).
4. Their ethical knowledge and ability to make correct ethical decisions (you know his will and approve of what is superior). The law of God gave them many detailed rules and regulations which they followed. It gave them a sense of being very pleasing to God, as they saw others making the wrong choices.
5. Their knowledge and education in the law (you are instructed in the law). They did not just have the law, but they mastered it.
6. Their disseminating this knowledge of God's law to others (a light for those who are in the dark). They spread the knowledge of the law everywhere.

All this boils down, basically, to a pride in their moral decency and virtue.

Verses 25-29 mention circumcision, the religious ceremony by which a Jew was brought into the covenant community of Israel. So vv.17-24 names "moral behavior," and vv.25-29 names "religious observance" as the two factors that the Jews relied on. Some people are religious, but not fastidiously moral, some people are scrupulously moral, but not religiously active. The Jews had both.

2. Insert "Christian" for "Jew," and other words for "circumcision" and paraphrase vv.17-20 and vv.25-29 as a warning to active church people today?

You could replace the word "circumcision" with "baptism" or "church membership." Everything said of the Jews could be said of church members and people who profess to be Christians today. You could paraphrase it like this:

vv.17-20. "You call yourself a born-again Christian, and you are assured that you are all right with God because you signed a commitment card or walked an aisle and really cried that night — you remember you had strong feelings for God, so you must have been converted that night. You are rather proud that you have memorized dozens of Scripture verses and have the "right" answer to a large array of questions. You also brag to yourself that you have led other people to make a commitment to Christ, and you have been leading a Bible study!"

vv.25-29. "But so what if you have been baptized. Has there been a real change in your life? Has your heart been truly affected? Is there an internal softness, a

humbled, grateful spirit, a sense of God's presence? Don't you know that Christianity is not having confidence in these external things — it is a new creation inside that comes from trusting in Christ, not your spiritual achievements?"

3. v.22 Since Jews totally abhorred idols and would never take one for themselves, what does Paul mean when he charges them with "robbing temples?"

One possibility (I think, less likely), is that some Jews, though not worshipping idols themselves, would take idols out of temples and sell them to others. This would be a lot like working to produce a pornographic magazine that you would never want your own children to see.

A more likely explanation is that the term "robbing temples" is figurative. Paul is making a radical approach to the commandments, just like Jesus does in Matthew 5:21-48. There Jesus says: "You were told 'Thou shalt not kill,' but killing is more than the external act. It is also the motive of the heart. So if you have a grudge against your brother, if you want him to be harmed, then you have violated the command against murder. You were told 'Don't commit adultery,' but if you lust after someone who is not your wife, you have violated the command against adultery." Now drawing that principle out here, Paul is saying, "Idol-worshipping is more than the physical act. If you let anything become your meaning in life — power, comfort, approval, possessions, pleasure, control, sex — you are violating the command against idolatry."

In other words, Paul is saying that it is quite possible to keep up a life of religiousness (without overt hypocrisy), but still really serve idols rather than God in the inner workings of the heart. You can be serving power or money or material things as the real saviors while keeping up religiosity. (In Romans 4 this subject is explored further.)

4. vv.21-24 How and why does the first of these false confidences fail? vv.25-29 How does the second fail?

The first confidence is in one's morality — it fails because (vv.21-23) we are all inconsistent in our behavior. We have the law, but no one keeps the law. There are two ways in which we all fail to keep the law.

1. There is occasional outright hypocrisy — "You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?" We purport to be moral, but we hide secret sins.
2. Then there is the continual sins of the heart and motives. "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" (Matt.5:21-24) No one can prevent the heart from continuous selfishness, lust, envy, anger, pride, anxiety. Thus morality is a dismal failure. For the very law we seek to honor, we dishonor — we blaspheme (v.24).

The second confidence is in one's religious observance — it fails because it cannot change the heart. Rituals and baptism or circumcision or church/synagogue-going are

insufficient to change the heart. Paul says only the Spirit of God can change the heart (v.29), not the observance of laws and rules and regulations.

5. v.17 What do “rely” and “brag” mean? How can it be wrong to “brag” about your relationship to God? In what ways can the orthodox and moral totally miss the gospel?

A. To “rely on the law” is moralism. It is making the moral law (a good thing) into a system of salvation. The content of the law is fine, but using the law as a system of salvation is death. But moralism is extremely common and always has been. It is the biggest actual religion in the world. It is extremely common today for people to compare themselves with others, notice that they are “a lot more decent than most people,” and say, “If there is a God, he’ll certainly receive me.”

B. To “brag of your relationship to God” As can be seen in vv.25-29, this “relationship” was not so much a personal intimacy with God, but it was a pride in their corporate identity, being part of the people that God had chosen and had revealed himself to. It happens quite commonly today. Many people identify with their religion nationally. Because they are British, they are Episcopal, because they are Italian, they are Catholic, because they are Greek, they are Orthodox. They feel their religion is part of their nationality and they are proud of it. If you tell them they are lost unless there is something more than that, they feel you insult their country.

But in addition, it is quite possible to put your faith in your religious practice for salvation instead of God. In fact, you can even trust in Christianity instead of Christ. This happens even in conservative, orthodox and evangelical churches.

“Dead orthodoxy” is a condition where the basic doctrines of the Bible are accurately subscribed to, but they do not vitalize the people. There is an intellectual grasp of sorts, but the gospel does no internal revolution (see v.25-29). Dr. Richard Lovelace says that church members who do not truly grasp that they are justified by faith only, “apart from their present spiritual achievement, are subconsciously radically insecure persons” (See Dynamics of Spiritual Life, p.212). Dead orthodoxy makes the church into a “religious cushion” which gathers people who desperately need reassurance that they are all right. Various churches do it in many ways.

1. “Legalistic churches” produce detailed codes of conduct and details of doctrine. Members need to continually hear that they are more holy and accurate and that the liberals are wrong. Their “theological correctness” is what they rely on.
2. “Power churches” put great emphasis on miracles and spectacular works of God. Members need to continually have power/emotional experiences and see dramatic occurrences. Their feelings and these dramatic answers to prayer is what they rely on.
3. “Sacerdotal churches” put great emphasis on rituals and tradition. Guilt-ridden people are anaesthetized by the beauty of the music and architecture and the grandeur and mystery of the ceremony.

Now theological accuracy, moral conscientiousness, praying in faith, and beautiful worship are all fine! But these elements are all regularly used as a form of “dead works,” replacements for reliance on the righteousness of Christ.

“Much that we have interpreted as a defect of sanctification [lack of maturity] in church people is really an outgrowth of their loss of bearing with respect to justification [the gospel of received righteousness].” (p.212) The importance of this principle cannot be overemphasized.

6. vv.21-29 How, then, can you tell if an active church member’s faith is empty and under God’s judgment? What are the signs or symptoms of “dead orthodoxy?”

Here are the signs Paul alludes to in the text:

1. There is a theoretical-only stance toward the Word of God. (v.21) “You who teach others — do you teach yourself?” This means that the person loves the concepts of the truth, but never comes under, never feels its power. The “moralist” or dead orthodox person is seldom or never “under conviction.” A real Christian finds the Bible “alive and active” (Heb.4:12), with a life of its own, constantly convicting, comforting, thrilling, disturbing, melting, lifting you up, slamming you down. Does this happen to you? Do you teach yourself?
2. There is a subtle or obvious moral superiority. (v.17) “You...brag.” (v.19) “A light for those who are in the dark.” If you are relying on your spiritual achievements (morality and/or religious observance), you will have to “look down” on those who have failed in the same areas. Moralists/dead orthodox are at least “cold” and at worst very judgmental toward those who are struggling. They have no warm words of encouragement to them. A sign of this condition is that you are not approachable — people don’t want to share their problems with you. You aren’t a sympathetic person. In addition, moralists/dead orthodox tend to gossip and backbiting and great defensiveness
3. Most important, there is a total lack of an “inner life.” (v.29) “circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit”. This is a most vivid image — a circumcised heart is one spiritually melted and softened. It means to have an active prayer life, a sense of the presence and nearness of God. Now that is something that moralistic and/or the dead orthodox do not have regularly. They may get “feelings” when they are caught up in the liturgy or excitement of a corporate service, but they are radically unsure that God loves them, and so they experience a long-term deadness within. (This is not to say that a real Christian always has great quiet times!)
4. There may be outright hypocrisy and a “double-life” (v.22). It is possible that the “pillar of the church” is having an affair or is dishonest in business.

7. vv.23-24 and 29 What practical difference would it mean for you as a real Christian today if you took Paul's warning seriously? Does anyone scorn God's name because of you?

Paul's charge that, "The Gentiles blaspheme because of you," lays down a convicting principle. A life of religious legalism is always distasteful to those outside the faith, but a life of obedience arising from faith in the gospel is an attractive life to those outside the faith. A moralist is trusting in his or her moral character and religious beliefs, and so the moralist is touchy to criticism (you are messing with the foundation!), and so the moralist is smug, and so on. The Christian may also be very obedient and religious in observance, but there is a joy, love, peace, humility within. That is attractive. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22ff.) can't grow under a self-justification religion.

Paul is thus arguing to the Jews: "You were called to be a light to the world, but the world finds your religion wholly unattractive. Don't you see that therefore you must have misunderstood it?" But this warning comes to us. Are you attractive? Is your humility, your love, your cool under pressure obvious for others to see? Only the gospel produces that. Moralism cannot.

"As you read your Bible day by day, do you apply the truth to yourself? What is your motive when you read the Bible? Is it just to have a knowledge of it so that you can show others how much you know, and argue with them, or are you applying the truth to yourselves? As you read, say to yourself, 'That is me! What is it saying about me?' Allow the Scripture to search you, otherwise it can be very dangerous. There is a sense in which the more you know of it, the more dangerous it is to you if you do not apply it to yourself.

People today are saying, 'Look at those Christians!... They can talk marvelously when the sun is shining and when the business is going well, and when there is no trouble in the family, but the moment anything goes wrong they are even worse than many who are not Christians.' Is that Christianity? — That's a perfectly logical, perfectly fair deduction for them to make."

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

8. 3:1-8 In vv.1,3, and 5 Paul states three objections to what he has been saying, and in vv.2, 4, 6-8 he answers them. What are they?

(This is a most difficult section, and not critical to understand Paul's argument. Only do this if you have time).

See the "detailed outline" at the top of the leader's notes.

Romans

Why everyone needs the Gospel

Study 5 | Romans 3:9-20

Summary

3:9-10 Everyone is “under sin”

Sin and our selves

v.11 No one wants God — sin in the mind and heart

v.12 No one obeys God — sin in the will

3:11-18 Everyone’s under the power of sin

Sin and our neighbors

v.13 Sin and words: no truth

v.14 Sin and words: no love

vv.15-17 Sin and deeds: we fight

Sin and our God

v.18 No one fears God

3:19-20 Everyone’s under the guilt of sin

v.19 There is universal accountability

v.20a There is universal condemnation

v.20b The law cannot save us, but only show us our condemnation

1. v.9 Paul says every person is “under sin.” a) What does that mean? b) How can both religious people (Jews) and depraved pagans be “alike” under sin?

Paul says, all are under sin, as it is written, “There is none righteous.” Thus to be “under sin” and to be “unrighteous” is the same thing. If we remember that “righteous” is a positional term, we will realize it means that no one is blameless with respect to God and others. We have wronged God, and others — we owe them, we are in their debt, they have a claim against us. To be “under sin” is thus a *legal position*.

“The Bible does not say, ‘Is he a good man?’ The Bible does not ask how much good he does or whether he is respectable; it does not ask those questions at all. It says, ‘Every man is either under sin or under grace.’ In other words, we must always think of ourselves not primarily in terms of addictions or of any particular things that are true about us; it is our whole condition that matters... Let me use an analogy. If you visited a foreign country, the first thing they would want to know about you is not the color of your hair or eyes or your bank balance or whether you are a nice person — the first thing they would want to know is what country you belong to. Are you a citizen of this country or a foreigner? They would want to know the realm to which you belong.”

– Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones

Paul's very amazing statement is that Jews and Gentiles *alike* are under sin. In chapter 1 we saw that the Gentiles Paul was referring to lived lives of tremendous immorality and debauchery, while the Jews, though inconsistent (2:22-23) were conscientious and moral. Yet Paul says they are *alike* under sin.

Now this cannot mean that every person is as sinful as every other person. It must mean that our legal condition is all the same — we are all lost, and there are no degrees of lostness. Here are two illustrations to get this idea across:

A. Imagine two people are killed. One is poisoned by a small spider bite, and he dies in his sleep. The other is mauled by a lion, and is terribly disfigured. Can we say that one person is more dead than the other? Are there degrees of death?

B. Imagine three people try to swim from Hawaii to Japan. One man can't swim and drowns after floundering 30 feet. Another is an average swimmer and drowns after 5 miles. Another is a championship swimmer and dies after 30 miles. But they all drowned because, though one was 5,000 times stronger than the other, none of them could come a fraction of the way to Japan. Is one more drowned than the others?

In the same way, the religious person may trust in morality, and the pagan in sensuality, but neither are trusting in God for their salvation. The religious persons may be better morally, but neither they nor the pagans come close to a righteous heart. So they are all lost, all condemned to perish. Perishing is perishing, condemnation is condemnation. Everyone is equally "under sin."

2. vv.10-18 Paul gives us a long list of all the effects of sin on us. There are at least seven. What are they?

1. On our legal standing. That no one is *legally* righteous, and no one's deeds can change that. We are guilty and condemned. (v.10) Even our best deeds and performances are completely useless in improving our standing before God. "No one does good... become worthless." The deeds are not truly good, but are self-serving ways of avoiding God's salvation (v.12b). See more under question #5 below.

2. On our minds. Because our core nature is corrupted by sin, we don't understand God's truth (v.11 a) Sin clouds and "darkens" the thinking about spiritual issues. Eph.4:18 says "They are darkened in their understanding... because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart." Notice that the ignorance does not cause the hardness of heart, but the hardness of heart (sin) causes the ignorance, which leads to a lack of understanding. Sin (our self-centeredness) leads us to "filter out" a lot of reality — it is a form of denial. We don't want to see the holiness and sovereignty of God or the sinfulness and weakness of ourselves. As a result, we are blind to many truths and thus our thinking, for lack of data, does not work.

3. On our motives. v.11b. "No one seeks for God." None of us want to find him at all, rather, we are running and hiding from him in all we do, even in our religion and our morality! (v.11) For more on "no one seeks for God," see much more under questions #3 and #4 below.

4. On our will. v.12a “They have turned away... there is no one who does good.” This is very much like Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way.” This is a statement about our willfulness, our self-will. In other words, sin can be defined as our demand for self-determination, for the right to choose our own paths.

5. On our tongues. vv.13-14 “Their throats are open graves.” This is about *how sin effects the tongue* — our speech and words. The image here is that of a grave with rotting bodies in it. Sinful words are signs of and causes of decay. The two areas of sinful words mentioned are *deceit*, or dishonesty, and *bitterness* or malice. We use our tongues to deceive and to harm.

6. On our relationships. vv.15-17 “...shed blood... peace they do not know.” This is how sin affects relationships. In our relationships, we are after each other’s blood. We are self-centered, so we fight with those who get in our way. As a result, there is never peace! Who can look at human history and argue with this analysis?

7. On our relationship to God. v.18 “No fear of God.” See under question #6 below.

3. v.11 Paul says, “No one seeks for God.” a) What does this mean? b) How does this statement square with all the people who seem to be searching for God?

“Seeking after God” should be understood in its obvious meaning. It is a desire to know the true God, to find and enjoy *Him*. This would include a desire to worship God and to appreciate and rejoice in him for who he is.

Many will say, “Paul has gone too far. I know many people in this world today who are not Christians at all and who never go to church — but many of them pray and many of them are searching profoundly. And then there are people in other religions. Surely Paul has overdone it!” But Paul does *not* say, “No one seeks for spiritual blessings,” or “No one seeks for God to answer prayers,” or “No one seeks for spiritual power and experience and peace.” He does not say that because many, many people do that. But Paul is saying — *that no one, in his or her natural self and ability wants to find God.*

Example #1. They might have an intellectual interest in the possibility of God or a philosophical conviction that there is a God. That is not a real passion to meet God face to face — that is not seeking! In fact, intellectual interest can be a way of avoiding meeting the real God. Example #2. They might have a problem in their lives, and realize they need forgiveness (to deal with their guilt) or spiritual peace (to deal with their anxiety) or power/wisdom (to deal with a particular problem) or even mystical experience (to deal with their inner emptiness). But that is not the same thing as truly seeking to come face to face with the holy, living, sovereign God — it is seeking for what God can give us, but not for him. Paul is saying that sin and its self-centeredness so controls all spiritual searching for meaning and experience, that we will try to simply get blessings without prostrating ourselves before the living God. So the “spiritual seeking” is still a way to actually get away from God.

Luther said: “*No one seeks after God.* That is true both of those that do not at all care for God and of those... who *imagine* themselves to seek after God. They do not seek after God as He desires to be sought and found... The inward desire or seeking after God is true love of God...”

Jonathan Edwards puts it another way. He points out (*in The Religious Affections*) that people *do* seek the things that God can give, but only a heart regenerated and purified by the Spirit can seek God for who he is in himself. In other words, the natural (unaided) human nature might seek God’s gifts, but never God. Sin is self-centeredness, and thus this self-centeredness is connected to all we do. In true seeking of God (something that can only be done with the Spirit’s help), a person appreciates God for who he is in himself. A person loves and appreciates then the glory of God and the Word of God and not only when he or she directly benefits from them. In fact, Edwards said that a person without the Holy Spirit (who is still motivated by self-centeredness) can be attracted to the power and love of God—because you may need them! But *true* seekers are attracted to God’s holiness and glory, because they seek God for who he is in himself.

Lloyd-Jones says:

“Seeking [God] is much more active than asking [God] for things’. The moment you realize this content to the word ‘seek,’ you begin to see that the Apostle’s statement is quite right... Prayers do not mean that we are seeking God. Seeking God means you are trying to find God, and to get into His presence... To seek God means to desire God above everything and everybody, to seek His glory, to be anxious to promote his glory. To seek God in the biblical sense means that God is the center of our thinking.”

4. v.11 If Paul is right, what does it mean about *anyone* who *is* truly seeking to come into God’s presence?

It means that anyone who is truly seeking God has been sought by God. If no one is capable of seeking God, then any human beings seeking God must have already had some change go on inside them by the Holy Spirit.

This of course leads immediately to the whole issue of election and predestination. And you can’t avoid it. Paul is teaching the doctrine of “total inability.” He says it again in Romans 8:7,8: “The natural mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to the law of God, indeed it cannot.” It means that we aren’t capable of seeking God, so anyone who does seek God has already been enabled by the Spirit. Paul put it in II Tim 2:25: “God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth,” showing that repentance and knowledge of the truth is something God must grant. Jesus says the same when he says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44) and he repeats this in John 6:65.

There’s two ways this verse can effect you. You can concentrate on the life stories of *others* — you can let it upset you because you try to figure out what God is doing with

all the people who aren't seeking him. Or you can concentrate on the only life story you know — *yours*. Then you can rejoice to see that God is not trying to hide from you, that all the things you know about him are things he's granted. That should humble you. For who sees anything different in you? "What have you that you did not receive?" (I Cor 4:7). That should also comfort you. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you *will* carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." And it should fill you with *more* gratitude than you would feel if you thought that you were capable of seeking. If you were capable of seeking God, then your salvation would have begun with you; you would have contributed to it. But Paul shows us that it was by *sheer* grace, you didn't contribute *anything* to it. That should lead you to sing:

Tis not that I did choose thee, for Lord that could not be
 This heart would still refuse thee, hadst thou not chosen me
 My heart owns none before thee, for thy rich grace I thirst —
 This knowing: if I love thee, thou must have loved me first.

5. v.12 Paul says, "No one does good" and that our deeds are "worthless." But Jesus said we should do "good works" (Matt.5:16). How could both be right? Why is it necessary to understand that, "No one does good?"

The word for "worthless" was used for milk gone sour; it is completely useless. Some would say, "Paul has gone too far again! I know many people who aren't Christians who do a lot of good to society and to the people around him." But that is to miss the focus of Paul's passage. He is talking about our relationship to God and whether our good deeds can rectify that relationship. And he is showing us that in the ultimate sense, our good deeds cannot *at all* get us saved.

It is important to compare Paul's statement here with Isaiah 64:6, that "All our righteousness are as filthy rags." Paul also says it again in Phillipians 3 at greater length. He literally says that when he looks at all his best achievements, "I count them but dung that I may win Christ." (Phil. 3:8)

Is Paul going too far again? How can he say no one does anything good? The Bible sees a "good" deed as being both good in *form* AND in *motive*. For example, if you help an old lady across the street, that is good in form; it conforms to God's will for our behavior. But if you never help anyone across the street except rich old ladies that you are trying to milk for money, then obviously that deed arises from a selfish heart and selfish motives. Now when it comes to God, no one does good deeds, because a "good deed" is one done for God's glory and not our own (I Cor 10:31). The following quote shows how impossible it is to do good deeds until the gospel changes your heart.

Once in a kingdom long ago, a gardener grew a huge carrot, and decided to give it to his prince, because he loved his sovereign. When he gave it, the prince discerned his love and devotion, and that he expected nothing in return. So as the gardener turned to leave, he said, "Here, my son, I want to give you some of my land so you can produce an even greater crop. It is yours." And the gardener went home rejoicing. A nobleman heard of this incident and thought, "If that is what the

prince gives in response to the gift of a carrot, what would he give to me if I gave him a fine horse?" So the nobleman came and presented the prince with a fine steed as a gift. But the prince discerned his heart and said, "You expect me to give to you as I did to the gardener. I will not. You are very different. The gardener gave ME the carrot. But you were giving *yourself* the horse."

(from a sermon by Charles Spurgeon)

Now notice what this teaches. If you know God loves you in Christ, that there is nothing you can do but accept his perfect righteousness, then you can feed the hungry and visit the sick and clothe the naked, and all for God! But if you think you are going to get salvation in return for these good deeds, it is really *yourself* you are feeding, *yourself* you are clothing, *yourself* you are visiting! In other words, good deeds are not truly done for God, and thus are not truly *good* unless a person has accepted and grasped the gospel. All deeds done in the natural and normal way, in the hopes that they will procure God's favor and blessing and salvation, are not "worthless," and lead to either smugness (if our life goes well) or anger and self-pity (if our life does not go well). The "good" deeds outside of the gospel make your soul go sour.

It is necessary to understand this to be a Christian at all. **The main difference between a real Christian and a religious person is not so much their attitudes toward their sins, but toward their "good" deeds. Both Christians and Pharisees repent of their sins, but only Christians also repent (admit the inadequacy) of their "righteousness"!**

Note: We must be sure to admit the many deeds done by non-Christians which are most certainly "good" in the relative sense. They are not done in overt selfishness. And God gives many non-Christians wonderful talents and wisdom and goodness to make the world a livable place and to restrain its evil. Christians appreciate and value the world and all people as being created in God's image. This passage is not saying that no one but Christians have anything about them that is noble or wonderful or beautiful or great — it is saying that no one does *anything savingly good — meriting salvation before God.*

6. v.18 What is "the fear of God?" How does this fact — that we don't fear God — explain and even summarize everything else Paul's said about sin?

A summary of the passage:

When you get to v.18, Paul can sum up everything he has said. He has said that sin makes us misunderstand and run from God (v.11), to willfully control our own lives (v.12), so that even our good deeds are just ways of running away and hiding from God (v.12b). As a result, truth and love do not control our tongues (vv.13-14) or our actions (vv.15-17) and the result is complete disintegration and ruin and misery in life (vv.16-17). What does this all come from? Verse 18: "There is no fear of God."

The "fear of God" is a central concept in the Bible. We are repeatedly told, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." If you are going to understand "fear of God," you should look up Psalm 130:4 — where the Psalmist says he "fears" God because God

forgives sins! That shows that the “fear of God” does not mean a servile, cringing fear of punishment. It means rather an inner attitude of awe and respect and sober, trembling joy before the greatness of God. Another way to put this is in Psalm 16:8: “I have set the Lord always before me.” The psalmist says, “My secret is that I live my life keeping the greatness of God always before me. I always think of his glory and love and power and I let *who he is* control and effect me at all times. I live in light of him.

Now “fearing God” is the antidote to everything Paul says about sin.

“No one seeks.” Now sin is characterized by running from God. Sin makes you forget God, makes him unreal to you. It is the opposite of fearing God, in which your passion is to come before him and always think of him. So there are the two ways to live life — forgetting his reality, and being aware of his reality.

“Throats are open graves.” So it is only if the glory and love of God is unreal to you that you can lie or harm with the tongue, or that you can fight with people or be willful in the heart. All sin results from this lack of fear of God.

7. vv.19-20 It is crucial that, “Every mouth be silenced.” That is a spiritual condition. What is it? Have you attained it?

This is a condition where you realize that you cannot save yourself through your good deeds. John Gerstner explains.

The way to God is wide open. There is nothing standing between the sinner and his God. He has immediate and unimpeded access to the Savior. There is nothing to hinder. No sin can hold [you] back, because God offers justification to the ungodly. Nothing now stands between the sinner and God *but the sinner’s “good works.”* Nothing can keep him from Christ but his delusion... that he has good works of his own that can satisfy God... All they need is need. All they need is nothing... But alas, sinners cannot part with their “virtues.” They have none that are not imaginary, but they are real to them. So grace becomes unreal. The real grace of God they spurn in order to hold on to the illusory virtues of their own. Their eyes fixed on a mirage, they will not drink real water. They die of thirst with water all about them.

Gerstner again shows that what keeps people from Christ is not their sins, but the imagined value of their “virtues” and good works. It is not so much refusal to repent of their sins that damns them, but the refusal to repent of their “righteousness.” Only when they repent of *both* sin and righteousness can they be said to have had their “mouths stopped.”

TEACHING B

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

What is sin?

PART I. THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

“Through the law we become conscious of sin” Rom.3:20

Pascal

“Certainly nothing offends us more rudely than this doctrine [original sin], yet without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves.

What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth; depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error; the pride and refuse of the universe!

It is dangerous to make man see too clearly his equality with the brutes without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to make him see his greatness too clearly apart from his vileness. It is still more dangerous to leave him in ignorance of both. But it is very advantageous to show him both. Man must not think that he is on a level either with the brutes or with the angels, nor must he be ignorant of both sides of his nature, but he must know both.”

C.E.M Joad

“It is because we rejected the doctrine of original sin that we on the Left were always being disappointed; disappointed by the refusal of people to be reasonable, by the subservience of intellect to emotion, by the failure of true Socialism to arrive, by the behavior of nations and politicians, by the masses’ preference for Hollywood to Shakespeare and for Mr. Sinatra to Beethoven; above all, by the recurrent fact of war.”

Dorothy Sayers

“A young and intelligent priest remarked to me the other day that he thought one of the greatest sources of strength in Christianity today lay in the profoundly pessimistic view it took of human nature. There is a great deal in what he says. The people who are most discouraged and made despondent by the barbarity and stupidity of human behavior are those who... cling to an optimistic belief in the civilizing influence of progress and enlightenment. To them, the appalling outbursts of bestial ferocity in the totalitarian states, and the obstinate selfishness and stupid greed of capitalist society,

are not merely shocking and alarming. For them, these things are the utter negation of everything in which they have believed. It is though the bottom had dropped out of their universe... Now for the Christian, this is not so. He is as deeply shocked and grieved as anyone else, but he is not astonished. He has been accustomed to the idea that there is a deep interior dislocation in the very center of human personality... The delusion of the mechanical perfectibility of mankind through a combined process of scientific knowledge and unconscious evolution has been responsible for a great deal of heartbreak. It is, at bottom, far more pessimistic than Christian pessimism because, if science and progress break down, there is nothing to fall back upon. Humanism is self-contained — it provides for man no resources outside himself.

The Christian dogma of the double nature in man — which asserts that man is disintegrated and necessarily imperfect in himself and all his works, yet closely related by a real unity of substance with an eternal perfection within and beyond him—makes the present parlous state of human society seem less hopeless and less irrational.”

PART II. SIN'S DEFINITION

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q: What is sin?

A: Sin is any want (lack) of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. (I John 3:4)

John Bunyan

“Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love.”

J.I.Packer

“Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature, found at every point in every person. (I Kings 8:36; Rom.3:9-23; 7:18; I John 1:8-10)... This moral deformity is dynamic: sin stands revealed as an energy of irrational, negative, and rebellious reaction to God’s call and command, a spirit of *fighting* God in order to *play* God. The root of sin is pride and enmity against God... Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation and mode of existence.”

J.Gresham Machen

[1] "According to a very widespread way of thinking, what we call morality is simply the accumulated experience of the race as to the kind of conduct that leads to racial preservation and well-being... but sin, according to the Bible, is not just conduct that is contrary to the accumulated experience of the race... it is primarily against God."

[2] "There is the notion that sin is the triumph of the lower part of man's nature over the higher part — a triumph of the appetites of the body over the human spirit... In its extreme form, [this view] represents matter as being in itself evil [thus sex, bodily pleasure, physical well-being]... Those who regard matter [thusly] tend to asceticism. They tend, always, to abstention from enjoyment of the good things of this world as though such abstention were in itself a virtue — not a means to an end, but an end in itself... but if matter is essentially evil, and if God is good, then God could not have created matter, and thus matter existed independently of Him... but the Bible teaches that the material world, like the spiritual world, was created by God, and that none of God's works is to be regarded as evil... there may be an objection — does not the Bible repeatedly designate "the flesh" as an evil thing?... but in the Bible the word does not designate the body of man over against the spirit of man, but... the whole of man over against the Spirit of God. Thus sin is not just "the brute in us." No, it is very much more serious than that."

PART III. SIN IS A DISPOSITION OF THE WHOLE PERSON TOWARD GOD

"Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin" Rom.3:9

D.M.Lloyd-Jones

"According to the Bible every human being is in one of two positions, either under sin or under grace... The Bible does not say, 'is he a good man?'... We must always think of ourselves not primarily in terms of actions — it is our whole condition that matters. If you visited a foreign country, the first thing they would want to know about you is not the color of your eyes, your bank balance, or whether you are a nice person — but to what country you belong. In the same way, the Christian gospel does not start with details. You may live a very good life and not be a Christian at all... all, both Jews and Gentiles are under sin... and belong to that realm.

[Many] fail to realize this about sin. They will persist in thinking of it in terms of sins — particular sins and actions... [Sin] means you live in such a way that you do not often think of God, and if you do, you think of Him in terms of what He could and should do for you... [Sin is an entire] outlook of self-centeredness and human-centeredness. Our very outlook, the very way we organize our lives and our thinking — opposes God."

Martin Luther

"All natural inclinations are either without God or against him; therefore none are good... No hero undertakes great enterprises for the common good, but out of ambition, for which he is justly condemned: hence it must needs follow, that such original, natural desires and inclinations are wicked."

J.I. Packer

"The phrase "total depravity" ...signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and consequently... we cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost."

Rebecca Pippert

"What is the basic human disorder? According to Brazilian psychiatrist Keppe, it is "the disease of theomania — the desire to be god... the desire to be the playwright instead of the actor in the drama."

The same "God complex" is alive and well today. A friend came over the other day very enthusiastic about a New Age seminar she had attended. She said, "I've finally realized... God is in everything. Therefore, I am God and God is me. I must only think positive thoughts, and not let anything negative get in me or get me down. I don't say anything is wrong anymore, I just say, 'It doesn't work for me'." "You are the mother of teenagers," I responded. "How does your philosophy work out in raising children? Are they permitted to follow the same logic when you tell them to be in at midnight — 'Sorry Mom, that just doesn't work for me.' She hadn't thought of that."

PART IV. SIN IS INBORN, INTRINSIC TO HUMAN NATURE

"There is no one who understands, no one who seeks for God." Rom.3:11

Heidelberg Catechism

Q: Did God create a people so wicked and perverse?

A: No. God created them good and in his own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that they might truly know God their creator, love him with all their heart, and live with him in eternal happiness for his praise and glory.

Q: Then where does this corrupt human nature come from?

A: From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in paradise. This fall has so poisoned our nature that we are born sinners — corrupt from conception on.

Q: But doesn't God do us an injustice by requiring in his law what we are unable to do?

A: No, God created humans with the ability to keep the law. They, however, tempted by the devil, in reckless disobedience, robbed themselves and their descendants of these gifts.

J.I.Packer

"Original sin" meaning sin derived from our origin... means not that sin belongs to human nature as God made it, nor that sin is involved in the processes of reproduction and birth, but that a) sinfulness marks everyone from birth, and is there in the form of a motivationally twisted heart, prior to any actual sins; b) this inner sinfulness is the root and source of all actual sins; c) it derives to us in a real but mysterious way from Adam, our first representative toward God... we are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners..."

J.Gresham Machen

"The Bible teaches that every man comes into the world a sinner, with a corruption of nature out of which all individual transgressions proceed. That is the doctrine of original sin. It is against that doctrine... that the chief attack has been made. The attack has come to be connected with the name of a British monk who lived in the latter 4th and early 5th century. His name was Pelagius... there are millions of Pelagians living today, and most of them never knew that such a person as Pelagius ever lived. [He said] that every man begins life practically where Adam began it, perfectly able to choose good or evil... Sin [he said] is just a matter of individual acts; it appears only in those cases where a man... as a matter of fact chooses evil rather than good... According to the Augustinian [Biblical] view of sin, on the other hand, individual wrong choices do most emphatically come from the underlying state of the person who engages in them. Jesus said: "If the tree is good, the fruit is good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit is corrupt... how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." (Matt.12:33-35)

Reinhold Niebuhr

When his seven year old son got into a neighborhood brawl:

Maid to Niebuhr: *Professor Niebuhr, it is not your son's fault. It's the company he keeps.*

Niebuhr to Maid: *It is not the company he keeps. It is his own little black heart.*

John Gerstner

"The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death. Where there is no sin, there would be no death. Yet babies both suffer and die. "Therefore," said John Wesley, "children themselves are not innocent before God. They suffer, therefore they deserve to suffer..." "...our Lord has told us that there is no necessary connection between a particular sin and a particular suffering. A calamity coming upon a person is no proof that the person is a greater sinner than one on whom that particular calamity did not come. But suffering [as a whole] is completely connected to sin."

Martin Luther

"Original sin, after regeneration, is like a wound that begins to heal; though it be a wound, yet it is in course of healing, though it still runs and is sore. So original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us."

PART V. SIN IS FALLING SHORT OF GOD'S LAW

"They have all turned away." Rom.3:12

Francis Schaeffer

"The climax of the Ten Commandments is in Exodus 20:17: "Thou shalt not covet..." We must see that to love God with all the heart, mind, and soul is not to covet against God; and to love man, to love our neighbor as ourselves, is not to covet against man... *I am to love God enough to be contented; second I am to love men enough not to envy...* "[1] A quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God at that moment... If the contentment goes and the giving of thanks goes, we are not loving God as we should [something else has replaced him]. This inward area is the first place of loss of true spirituality. [2]...we should love men enough not to envy, and this is not only envy for money, it is for everything."

PART VI. SIN EXTENDS AND POLLUTES OUR BEST DEEDS

"No one does good, not even one." Rom.3:12

George Whitefield

"Before [you can be sure you are at peace with God] you must not only be troubled for the sins... of your nature, but likewise for the sins of your best duties and

performances. When a poor soul is somewhat awakened by the terrors of the Lord, then the poor creature, being born under the covenant of works, flies directly to a covenant of words again. And as Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees of the garden, and sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness, so the poor sinner, when awakened, flies to his duties and to his performances, to hide himself from God, and goes to patch up a righteousness of his own. Says he, "I will be mighty good now — I will reform — I will do all I can; and then certainly Jesus Christ will have mercy on me. But before you can [know you are at peace with God] you must be brought to see that God may damn you for the best prayer you ever put up; you must be brought to see that all your duties — all your righteousness — as the prophet elegantly expresses it—put them all together, are so far from recommending you to God, are so far from being any motive and inducement to God to have mercy on your poor soul, that he will see them to be filthy rags, a menstrous cloth — that God hates them, and cannot but away with them, if you bring them to him in order to recommend you to his favor. My dear friends, what is there in our performances to recommend us to God?"

I can say that I cannot pray without sin — I cannot preach without sin — I can do nothing without sin; and as one expresses it: my repentance needs to be repented of, and my very tears to be washed in the precious blood of my dear Redeemer. Our best duties are as so many splendid sins. Before you can know you are at peace with God, you must not only be made sick of your original and actual sin, but you must be sick of your righteousness, of all your duties and performances. There must be a deep conviction before you can be brought out of your self-righteousness; it is the last idol taken out of your heart. The pride of our heart will not let us submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But if you never felt that you had no righteousness of your own, if you never felt the deficiency of your own righteousness, you cannot come to Jesus Christ. There are a great many now who may say, "well we believe all this," but there is a great difference between talking and feeling. Did you ever feel the need of a dear Redeemer? Did you ever feel the want of Jesus Christ, upon the account of the deficiency of your own righteousness? And can you now say from your heart, "Lord, thou mayst justly damn me for the best duties that ever I did perform?" **If you are not thus brought out of yourself, you may say to your heart "Peace! Peace!" but there is no peace."**

Note: With furious logic, Whitefield shows that, if you think your good deeds have any intrinsic merit in them, you will use Jesus to help you save yourself, but you will not treat him as a saviour.

John Gerstner

"...the way to God is wide open. There is nothing standing between the sinner and his God. He has immediate and unimpeded access to the Savior. There is nothing to hinder. No sin can hold [you] back, because God offers justification to the ungodly. Nothing now stands between the sinner and *God but the sinner's "good works."* Nothing can keep him from Christ but his delusion... that he has good works of his own that can satisfy

God... All they need is need. All they need is nothing... But alas, sinners cannot part with their "virtues." They have none that are not imaginary, but they are real to them. So grace becomes unreal. The real grace of God they spurn in order to hold on to the illusory virtues of their own. Their eyes fixed on a mirage, they will not drink real water. They die of thirst with water all about them."

Gerstner again shows that what keeps people from Christ is not their sins, but the imagined value of their "virtues" and good works. It is not so much refusal to repent of their sins that damns them, but the refusal to repent of their "righteousness." Only when they repent of both sin and righteousness can they be said to have had their "mouths stopped."

Summary:

Legalism

Repents of sins

Christianity

Repents of sins AND
of righteousness

Liberalism

neither

PART VII. SIN CAN BE DEFEATED

William Shakespeare (Macbeth on guilt)

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

Heidelberg Catechism

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Westminster Confession (Chapter 15:4)

"As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation on those who truly repent."

Romans

How justification works

Study 6 | Romans 3:21-31

Summary

3:21-24 How righteousness from God is received

- v.21 It is not based on keeping the law
- v.22 It is received through faith in Jesus Christ
- vv.22b-23 It is needed by and available to every person
- v.24 It is free to us but costly to Christ

3:25-31 How righteousness from God is provided

- v.25 It is based on Christ's death
- v.26 It satisfies both God's justice and love
- vv.27-28 It gives all glory to God
- vv.29-30 It shows God to be God of the whole world
- v.31 It satisfies the law of God

1. vv.21-24 What can we learn from these 4 verses about what this "righteousness from God" is?

The very word "right" tells us it is a legal standing. (**Guiding question:** *What does it mean to get "right" with a person or an institution or "right with the law?"*) To be "right" with a person or an institution is a legal standing in which you *owe nothing*, to have no liabilities or claims against you. To be "right with a law" is to be completely obedient to it, so it cannot charge you. So to be "right with God" would mean to be in a condition of complete obedience — to owe God nothing that he commands because you've fulfilled it all. **Sum:** Righteousness is a legal standing that is the result of perfect behavior.

The word "from" (vv.21 and 22) **and "a gift"** (v.24) tells us this legal standing is received, not earned. In other words, the "perfect behavior" that results in this legal standing is not our perfect behavior, but that of someone else. Look at 3:20, where Paul talks about being "righteous in his sight." **Sum:** Therefore, *to receive this righteousness is to be declared righteous, to be treated or to be seen as perfectly righteous by God.*

The word "apart from the law" simply drives home what the word "from" implies—that it is received, not earned. Compare again with 3:20: "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law." Paul says that it is received, "apart from the Law" (v.21). It is not ours as the result of our conformity to any laws or moral code. It is not result of our working ourselves into any condition of surrender or humility or repentance. It does not come because of any merit in us at all.

Note: The word "righteousness" in v.21 and the word "justify" throughout the rest of the passage are all the same word — *dikaiosune*. To be "just" or "justified" is exactly the same as receiving God's righteousness. To be justified is to have a *record of merit*; it is the opposite of "guilty," which is to have a *record of wrongdoing*.

2. vv.22-25 What can we learn from these 4 verses about how this “righteousness from God” is *received* (and by whom)?

By faith, not by moral effort or our merits. That is clear from the statement “for all have sinned and fall short...” (v.23) and by what was already said in v.21 “apart from the law.” But Paul gets very specific about the nature of this saving faith:

By faith in Christ, not by faith in general. Supposedly, President Eisenhower once said that America was “founded on a deeply felt religious faith — and I don’t care what it is.” That is a typical response today; any other is seen as undemocratic. But Paul says it is not faith in general or faith in God in general, but faith “in Jesus Christ” (v.22) that brings the righteousness.

By faith in Christ’s work on the cross, *not* by general admiration of him. Paul is even more specific in v.24 and v.25. We become righteous “through faith in his blood.” Some people say, “I believe in Jesus,” but they mean a general admiration of him, and belief in him as an *example*, or even belief in him as a *help* in time of need. But that is not saving faith. The faith that brings this righteousness is a *specific trust in the work of Christ as being the perfect obedience that merits the legal standing we receive from God.*

By faith as only a receptor, not by faith as a kind of moral merit itself. It is possible to think of faith as a kind of “work,” a calling up of some psychological state of feeling toward God. (Some people think of faith as a kind of intense attitude of surrender or a state of certainty and confidence.) But Paul shows us here that we receive this righteousness “freely” (v.24). It is interesting to notice that this word is also used when Jesus Christ says, “They hated me *without a cause.*” (John 15:25). The word “freely” means “without a cause — wholly and totally unwarranted.” Therefore we must not fall prey to the subtle mistake of thinking that our faith actually saves us. Some say, “In the Old Testament, the works of the Law saved people, but now God has changed the requirements. Now all you have to do is put your heart in a state of faith, and that is all God wants.” But no, in both the OT and now, it is the work of Christ that merits our salvation, and faith is merely the way I receive it.

If you come to think that your belief is the cause of your salvation, it will get you to look at the quality of your faith, and when you see doubts it will rattle you. What has happened? You’ve turned your faith into a “work!” Faith is only the instrument by which you receive your salvation, not the *cause* of your salvation. If you don’t see this, you will have something to boast of — you can say, “The reason I am saved is because I produced a heart of faith,” but 3:31 says there is no basis for boasting.

Who can receive it — anyone. He says categorically that not only *can* anyone receive it, “To all who believe — there is no difference” (v.22) regardless of how bad their record is, he also says everyone *needs* to receive it, “For all have sinned and fall short” (v.23).

A helpful quote for summing up:

“We can put it this way: the man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself, and no longer looking to himself. He no longer looks at anything he once was. He does not look at what he is now. He does not [even] look at what he hopes to be as the result of his own efforts. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, and he rests on that alone. He has ceased to say, ‘Ah yes, I have committed terrible sins but I have done this and that...’ He stops saying that. If he goes on saying that, he has not got faith... Faith speaks in an entirely different manner and makes a man say, ‘Yes, I have sinned grievously, I have lived a life of sin... yet I know that I am a child of God because I am not resting on any righteousness of my own; my righteousness is in Jesus Christ, and God has put that to my account.’

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones

3. vv.24-26 Can't God just forgive us? Why does God only justify "through" the redemption of Christ and "through" his blood or "atoning sacrifice?"

Guiding question: What does Paul say is the barrier between God and us, a barrier that makes forgiveness difficult?

There is a barrier. The word “through” in verses 24 and 25 show that there is a barrier between God and us when it comes to forgiveness. Only the blood of Christ creates a door “through” that barrier; only “through” Jesus’ death can God give us this gift. These verses clearly teach the existence of this obstacle, and it is critical we understand it. During this century especially, it has been commonly taught that because God is love, all he has to do is merely say or pronounce that we are forgiven. The reasoning goes this way: “If my child has done something wrong and says, ‘I’m sorry’, well, I simply say, ‘That’s OK,’ and we are reconciled. Why can’t God just do the same? Why is there a need for Jesus’ death?” On this theory, Jesus only comes into the world to tell us God loves us, and that his death on the cross is merely an example of sacrificial love designed to move us.

But here we see what that barrier is — “his justice.” The death of Christ was necessary to satisfy his justice. The problem with the illustration of the parent and the child is that the relationship depicted is too simplistic. God’s relationship with us is more complex. He is not only the Fatherly one who loves us (he wants to justify us), but he is also the judge and king of the universe.

Once in a courtroom I heard a person being sentenced for a crime... On the one hand, a crime had been committed, and the person had to pay... Just as the judge was giving the sentence, a middle-aged man suddenly broke into racking sobs. He was clearly the father of the person on trial... This was somebody’s child grown up, a child still adored and treasured by a father. Even the judge paused, but he had his job to do and resumed sentencing. *The judge’s job is to sentence. The parent’s heart is to stand in for the child.*

– Rebecca Pippert

[You say] you can't conceive of a God who would ever punish anyone — that wouldn't be loving. But you have to understand God's [justice]. If I backed into the door of your new car out in the parking lot, and we went to court, and the judge said, 'That's no problem, Bill didn't really mean it,' you'd be up in arms. You'd want justice. If you went to a Cubs game, and Sutcliffe threw a strike down the middle of the plate, and the ump said, 'Ball four,' and walked in a run, you'd be out there killing the ump, because you want justice. [You] hear that and say, 'I guess you're right. I wouldn't want a God who wasn't just'. But before you say, "Rah, rah for a just God," let me tell you some of the implications. That means he metes out justice to you."

– Bill Hybels

Guiding question: Paul says that God had left sins committed before Christ "unpunished." Do you think that mean forgiven?

Verses 25-26 says he had "left the sins committed beforehand unpunished," but now the death of Christ demonstrates his justice. If he had really and totally forgiven the sins committed by the Old Testament people, they would be gone, and nothing more would have to be done. But Paul is showing us that the death of Christ *now* has paid the price for those sins. In other words, God in his patience simply deferred payment on them. The sacrifices and rituals of the Old Testament were only symbols pointing to Christ — they did not really pay the debts. God was accepting Abraham, and Moses, and David, and all the Old Testament saints when they repented and trusted in his mercy, but he accepted them on the basis of the future work of Christ. In his *forebearance*, he received them *in lieu* of Christ's work.

4. v.25 Look at two or three translations for the word Paul uses to describe Jesus' sacrifice in v.25a. Now look up the word "propitiation" in a dictionary. What does this word tell us about what Jesus death did for us?

Paul uses the word *hilastrion*: "God presented him as a hilastrion." The NIV translates this "sacrifice of atonement," while the old King James Version says, "propitiation." Several other modern translations (the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible) put in the word "expiation," but that is because the translators want to avoid the clear meaning of the word Paul uses. "Propitiation" means *the pacifying or turning away of someone's wrath*. It means that God's justice, or God's wrath (they are essentially the same thing) had to be turned away by a payment of the penalty for sin. Jesus' sacrificial death pacified the wrath of God.

Guiding question: Does this word depict God as a "blood-thirsty" God without any love?

"Prince Paris had carried off Princess Helen to Troy. The Greek expeditionary force had taken ship to recover her, but was held up half-way by persistent contrary winds. Agamemnon, the Greek general, sent home for his daughter and

ceremonially slaughtered her as a sacrifice, to mollify the evidently hostile gods. The move paid off; west winds blew again, and the fleet reached Troy without further difficulty... One might expect, therefore, that there would be no place for the idea of propitiation in Biblical religion. But we don't find this at all: just the opposite. The idea of propitiation — that is, of averting God's anger by an offering — runs right through the Bible. In the Old Testament, it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin-offering... In the New Testament, the 'propitiation' word group appears... in Romans 3:21-26, Hebrews 2:17, I John 2:1, and I John 4:8-10... [But] in paganism, man propitiates his gods, and religion becomes a form of commercialism and, indeed, of bribery. In Christianity, however, God propitiates His wrath by his own action. God presented him as a propitiation..."

– J.I. Packer

"The doctrine of the propitiation is precisely this — that God loved the objects of his wrath so much that he gave his own son to the end that he by his blood should make provision for the removal of his wrath."

– John Murray

5. vv.25-26 How can Jesus' "atoning sacrifice" make God both "just" AND "the one who justifies" those who believe?

The wonder of the cross is that it *in the very same stroke* satisfies both the love of God (that aspect of his nature that seeks our justification) and the *justice* of God (that aspect of his nature that demands the punishment of sin). Therefore God is just and can justify because, having punished Jesus in our stead, he can forgive us freely. The cross does not represent a compromise between God's wrath and love; it does not satisfy each one "half-way." Rather, it satisfies each *fully* and in the very same action. On the cross the wrath and love of God are both vindicated, they are both demonstrated, they are both expressed completely, they both shine out and are utterly fulfilled.

Guiding question: Paul says that the gospel "upholds the law" (v.31) — how does it do that?

Paul is saying that we no longer have to perfectly fulfill the law in order to be saved, not because the law has been set aside or its requirements changed, but because its requirements have been satisfied by someone else. The law of God is *still there* — it must be satisfied for anyone to stand in God's presence. Yet, in the cases of those who believe in Christ, it has been.

Verse 31 is very important to prevent misunderstandings of what Paul is saying. Some have thought that, with the coming of Jesus Christ, God has put aside the law. Some have taught something like this: "Previously, God required obedience to the law for our acceptance into his kingdom. Now he has changed that — he has set aside the law and all he requires is faith." We've seen (above) that such a view would turn faith into a "work," and it would put a lot of pressure on us to maintain a condition of doubtlessness. But it would also compromise the justice of God. How could he just "put aside" the law? The law of God is only the expression of God's own nature as perfectly

good and just. How could he set aside part of himself? Instead, v.31 shows that God has *not* set aside the law — *it is **still** the basis for our acceptance!* But now God has put forward his own son as the substitute for us before the law. A schematic view of these two views:

What is the reason for our acceptance?

Full obedience to the law and Christ. Faith in God.

Who provides it?

Only Jesus does. We do.

6. What distortions enter our lives if we think of God *only* as “just” or *only* as “justifier?”

Unless your God is a God of both holy anger vs. evil and sacrificial love, it will introduce distortions into your life. If you object to the idea of a God with standards, you are like a child who bucks against the parental limits, and, who, if he succeeds to leave them behind, spends his life disoriented, “liberated” and yet feeling no support, nothing to rely on, nothing under, around him, suffering spiritual vertigo. We hear a lot of abusive parents, but completely permissive parents, who set no limits, give no guidance, never confront their children, are just as destructive. And the world is full of people raised on a supposedly “loving,” enlightened view of God who feel like orphans BECAUSE THEY ARE. But a wrathful God without grace will never give you the motivation to live a decent life. Only Love can awaken love in someone else. Fear can’t elicit love. If you have a God *only* made of standards and righteousness, you will be a driven person, never able to live up, always fleeing when no one pursues.

How great that he sends his anger to drive us into the arms of his love!

7. Paul says the gospel excludes boasting (v.27). How does it do that? How has it excluded boasting in you?

A great way to understand what Paul means here is to look at how the gospel changed him personally in this regard. Go to Phillipians 3:4-11. There he mentions all the things he used to *boast* in: “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” That includes family pedigree, racial background, professional/educational attainments and religiosity/morality. Then he says, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Phil. 3:7-8)

“Boasting” to Paul evidently means something more profound than mere bragging. It is a profound psychological-spiritual concept. What you boast in is what fundamentally defines you, *what gives us our confidence as we move out into the world*. Paul shows that we can get our confidence out of racial pride, educational pride, religious/moral pride. But the gospel changes this completely so we only “boast” in the Lord’s grace toward us.

The problems that “boasting” (in anything but the Lord) brings us:

1. Human divisions. Pride in race, social status, or achievement *necessarily* leads to prejudice and condescension and hostility. To get our confidence we must see ourselves as better than other classes of people.

2. Denial. If our confidence comes from our race/people, we will have to blind ourselves to the evils and flaws of our people. It leads to racism, classism, etc. If our confidence comes from our moral attainments, we will have to blind ourselves to our sins, our selfishness. It makes us tremendously touchy when someone criticizes our religion or moral character, because our moral purity is our only strength. If we lose it, we lose everything. If our confidence comes from someone’s love (a parent’s, a child’s, a spouse’s, a romantic partner’s), we will have to blind ourselves to the beloved’s sins, or we will have to blind ourselves to any unhealth in the relationship, or we will not be able to give “tough love” when needed.

3. Anxiety. When anything we boast in is threatened, our fundamental security is threatened. We are vulnerable to great terror.

The gospel creates a whole new mindset. The marks of it:

1. Your mind is deeply satisfied with the doctrine of justification. You say, “I see it, It’s staggering! He accepts me with all my flaws because Jesus paid it! What a wonder!” You never get tired of thinking about it — you can’t get enough of it!
2. A new freedom from denial. The gospel gives you a grounding so criticism and “bad news” and negative evaluations can now be handled. “Bad news” no longer threatens your confidence. Now, the more you see your faults, your failures, the more amazing and precious does God’s love appear, and the more loved by him you feel. This is a critical test! If fundamentally you reject the whole idea of the cross and Jesus as substitute, if you really think that it is your performance upon which your worthiness and acceptability hangs, then when your sin is revealed, instead of it making you feel closer to him, it drives you away
3. A new freedom from anxiety. Slowly you become a more courageous person — not afraid of death or the future or other people. You come to know that God is FOR you. “He is for me so I can face death, I know the future is in his hands, he wouldn’t go to all this trouble and not give me what I really need.”

Romans

When justification started

Study 7 | Romans 4:1-25

Summary

4:1-8 – *Why Abraham was saved*

Abraham was given, “credited,” righteousness, so salvation is a gift, not earned.

- v.1 He discovered justification by grace long ago
- v.2 Had he been saved by works he would have been able to boast before God — an impossibility!
- v.3 Scripture proves it: he was “credited” righteous
- v.4 A wage is an obligation; a gift is not. Every benefit is either one or the other
- v.5 so salvation comes only to those who stop trying to work for it, but receive it as a gift
- v.6 David also talks of this “credited righteousness”
- vv.7-8 A believer is one whose sins are not credited or counted against him

4:9-17 – *When Abraham was saved*

Abraham’s righteousness came before circumcision and the law, so salvation is for all, not some.

- v.9 Is this credited righteousness only for the Jews?
- v.10 Abraham got credited righteousness before he was circumcised
- v.11 Therefore, non-Jews who trust in the same promises will get credited righteousness
- v.12 and Jews who trust will get the same
- v.13 Abraham got credited righteousness before the law was given
- v.14 To live by law means you can’t receive what’s promised, and you only get God’s disapproval
- v.15 for the law can only show us where we fall short
- v.16 So salvation comes by grace to those who believe the promise, whether Jew and Gentile
- v.17 Scripture proves it: he fathers not one but many nations

4:18-23 – *How Abraham was saved*

Abraham’s faith is a case study for us, so we can truly be his “children.”

- v.18 Faith’s object — the promise of descendants

- v.19 Faith's realism — he didn't deny the obstacles
- vv.20-21 Faith's focus — the glory and power of the promiser
- v.22 Faith's result — credited righteousness
- vv.23-24 Scripture makes his faith an example for us
- v.25 *Our* faith's object — Jesus (Abraham's descendant) who died and rose for our salvation

An extremely important word in this section is the Greek term *logizdomai*. It is translated "credited" in verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24 (and as "counted" in v.7).

1. Look at each place the word "credited" is used. Put the meaning of the term in your own words.

This is an accounting term meaning "to count as." To "credit" something is to confer a status that was not there before. An example: Some houses can be "leased to buy." If a decision is made to purchase, the owner now counts past rent payments as mortgage payments. A new status is granted to those payments.

2. The Jews of the time thought faith = obedience of the law. How does Paul in vv.2-4 show that saving faith is not that?

1. First of all, to say that faith is credited as righteousness means that faith in itself is not righteousness. Faith could not be an active accomplishment of good deeds, or it would not need to be granted a new status. Faith is therefore something that is receptive. Faith is not a "work" that merits anything.
2. Paul says if faith = obedience, then salvation is not a gift. And if it is not a gift, God would be obligated to save us (v.4). That of course runs counter to the whole tenor of the Bible.
3. Paul says if *faith = obedience*, then we who are saved would be able to boast before God and others, for we are the real authors of our salvation. But that is antithetical to the spirit and character of the great patriarchs like Abraham (v.2). Notice how Paul argues in v.2. Paul supposes, *if Abraham was justified by works*, and then draws the logical conclusion, that *then he had something to boast about*. But Paul simply throws his hands up at the impossibility of such a conclusion — but not before God! In other words, the clear falsity of the conclusion shows that the premise (that Abraham was justified by works) is wrong.

In other words, if *faith = obedience*, then the actual object of faith is you yourself and your abilities. It leads to boasting and pride (or to despair and self-hatred). But if *faith = trust God's promise to save*, then the actual object of faith is God and his ability. That leads to humility and confidence.

Note: Even today, many Jewish commentators find Paul's definition of faith perplexing. One writes: "Faith becomes a zealous obedience in the matter of fulfilling the law... [Paul's position] of absolute opposition between faith, on the one hand, and the law, on the other... has always been unintelligible to the Jewish thinker." (H.J. Shoeps, *Paul*, London: 1962)

3. Name the two parts of real saving faith according to v.5? (Guiding question: Paul says a Christian is one who "does not work" v.5. What does that mean?)

In contrast, to the model of **faith = obedience of the law**, Paul gives us a model **faith = trust of God's saving provision**. In verse 5, we are told that saving faith consists in 1) the cessation of one kind of trust and 2) the commencement of another kind:

First, a saved person does not work (v.5a). This cannot mean that a saved person does not obey the law (see 3:31 and 6:1-2). It must therefore mean that the saved person no longer trusts in obedience as a way to be saved. A Christian is one who stops working to be saved, not one who stops working!

Second, a saved person trusts God who justifies the wicked (v.5b). This means a Christian is one who trusts in God as having a way to save apart from our efforts.

Sum: *Saving faith is a "trust transfer."* It is the removing of one's hopes and trust from other things and the placing of them on God as saviour. Then v.5 concludes by saying that, if we stop trusting in ourselves as justifiers and start trusting him as justifier, the result is credited righteousness.

4. How does this definition of faith differ from what so many churchgoers and religious people think faith is?

Abraham wasn't saved by just believing *in* God. Verse 3 says that Abraham believed God. It isn't a general belief in God that saves, but it is believing God when he promises a way of salvation by grace.

Saving faith is not faith in God in general. You can have lots and lots of strong faith that God exists, that he is loving, that he is holy. You can believe that the Bible is God's holy word. You can show great reverence for God. Yet all the while you can be seeking to be your own saviour and justifier by trusting in performance in religion, performance in moral character, performance as a parent, performance in vocation, etc.

To say saving faith is a "trust transfer" is to consciously see where your trust is, and remove one's hopes and trust from those things and to place them on God as saviour in particular (not only on him as God in general).

There is a well-known book called *Evangelism Explosion*, by D. James Kennedy. If you want to share the gospel with someone, the author suggests to begin with a question: "If you were to die tonight and go before God, and he were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?" Another version of the question: "Assuming for the moment that there really is a heaven, what do you think are the

general requirements for admission? Who gets in and who doesn't? Anyone who asks this question to a random sample of church-going people will be surprised at the large number of people who say, A) "because I have tried my best to be a good Christian" or B) "because I believe in him and try to do his will, or C) "because I believe in him with all my heart."

This is not a trick question — it reveals common misconceptions about what it means to believe. Answer type (A) is a "salvation by works" answer. (B) is a "salvation by faith plus works" answer. (C) is a "salvation by faith AS a work" answer. In each case, the religious person has not "stopped working" and has not done a real trust transfer. In the last case, the person has even come to trust in his or her trust. But each alternative misses the glorious release of the gospel. These false understandings of saving faith will lead to insecurity, anxiety, a lack of assurance, possible spiritual pride, touchiness to criticism, and a devastation in light of any moral lapses!

So this definition of faith cuts against both the religious person and the irreligious person. On the outside one seems to have faith and the other does not. But the religious person may be just as lost, having never confronted his or her own trust in self-justification.

5. Paul talks in v.6 of "credited righteousness." Define "credited righteousness" from v.5 and v.8.

"Credited" must mean a legal position or status or standing. Why? Clearly, the righteousness in view cannot be that of a loving heart or of a humble spirit or of honest behavior. That is actual righteousness of character. To have righteousness "credited" to persons means that they are *treated or regarded* as if they were actually righteous, though in themselves they are still sinful in heart and behavior.

The proof of this interpretation can be seen in v.5 in the remarkably striking statement, "*God who justifies the wicked.*" Here is a clear statement that when you receive your credited righteousness you are still wicked! Then in vv.7-8 Paul demonstrates that being in a state of "credited righteousness" means that your sin is not counted (Greek-*logizdomai*) against you. That means that though you are sinning, it cannot condemn you, it does not effect your status before God.

In summary: Christians are regarded by God as holy and perfect, though at the same time they are sinful and imperfect.

Note: Verse 5 shows that "justification" and "credited righteousness" are the same thing. To be "justified" is to receive "credited righteousness." This is what Martin Luther called "passive righteousness" and what theologians call "imputed righteousness."

6. How does Paul make his case in vv. 9-17 that salvation is not just for Jews, but for all?

The Jews saw circumcision as the sign of membership in the Jewish nation. It was both a religious and cultural symbol of belonging to God and of solidarity with the Hebrew people.

In vv. 9-10, Paul makes the point that Abraham was already credited as righteous in Genesis 15, though he didn't get circumcised until Genesis 17. Then in vv. 11-12 and following he reasons, "If Abraham was saved by faith without circumcision, then so will uncircumcised (non-Jewish) people be saved today by faith without circumcision."

In vv. 13-17, Paul contrasts again two models of faith. Instead of **faith = obedience to the law**, he gives the model **faith = trust in the promise**. Abraham was saved before there was circumcision, and well before the formal law was given by Moses. So how was he saved? Through trust in the promises of God. And Gentiles, those outside circumcision and the Mosaic law can be saved in the same way.

7. How does the case of Abraham (vv.18-25) illustrate the difference between only believing in God, and believing God (v.3)? How can his example help you strengthen your faith (v.19)?

Abraham did not simply believe that God existed and that he was good and holy. To *believe God* is to look at what God has said and to let that define reality for you. We are told what it means to "believe God."

1. **To not go on feelings or appearances.** *He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead* (v.19a). Elsewhere Paul says, "we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith is not opposed to reason, but to feelings and appearances. Abraham looked at his body and it looked hopeless. But he didn't go on appearances. This shows us that faith is not simply an optimism about life in general, nor is it faith in oneself. It is the opposite. Faith begins with a kind of death to self-trust. Faith is going on something despite our weakness, despite our feelings and perceptions.
2. **To focus on facts about God.** *He gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power* (vv.20-21). This shows that faith is not the absence of thinking, but rather is a profound *insistence* on acting out of measured reflection, instead of just reacting to circumstances. Abraham pondered and considered the power of God. He thought it out like this: "If there is a Creator God at all (and I know there is), he must have all power — there can be no limit to it. God knows Sarah and I are both old — but he's the one who hung the sun and moon and scattered the stars like sand with both hands! It is ridiculous for me to think our agedness presents such a being with an obstacle!" Faith is thinking about God — focusing on facts about him.
3. **To trust the bare word of God.** *That God had power to do what he had promised* (v.21). Lastly, we see that "believing God" is not simply thinking about God but trusting his word. Indeed, it is taking God at his word even when there is nothing else to go on, when feelings, popular opinion, and common sense seem to contradict his promise.

Abraham shows us the way to strengthen our faith. 1) Get to know a lot more about God! Study, reflect, meditate. Abraham was able to overcome his sense of weakness by reasoning things on the basis of what he knew about God. You need to do the same. 2) Act on God's promises and word even when it is hard. Faith is living as if these promises are true. For example, you give away your money generously, though that may appear economically risky, because of his promise to care for the generous giver (Malachi 3:9-10). You tell the truth even though it may lose you a friend or favor with a particular circle, because you know it pleases the God who is Lord of history and who holds the hearts of all people in his hands.

"There are two factors which determine the strength of our faith. The first is our knowledge of God. That is the most important factor in faith — it was Abraham's knowledge of God that made him the man he was.

The second element is our application of what we know. That is most important also... The disciples in the boat during the storm were failing to apply their faith and that is why our Lord put His question to them in that particular form. He said, 'Where is your faith?' You have faith, but where is it? Why do you not apply it to this situation? What have you been doing with your faith? Why isn't it here? Why are you not applying it to this very situation in which you find yourselves?' The trouble with the disciples is that they did not use the faith they had; they did not think. They were looking at the waves and the water coming into the boat.

[But faith is application of the *promises*, the word of God.] Many people say they prayed 'the prayer of faith'... and the healing did not take place, and they are greatly perplexed... but they misunderstand what God's word promises. Now Abraham was perfectly clear about that... God has not promised that His people are always to be well...

In other words... faith is holding on to the faithfulness of God. Faith does not even look at itself. I go further. Faith is never interested in itself and never talks about itself. That to me is a very good test. I always distrust people who talk about their faith. That is the characteristic of the cults. They always direct attention to themselves... you have to be 'thinking positively'. The emphasis is on the self. But faith looks at God, holds on to the faithfulness of God. Abraham 'gave glory to God'."

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones

Romans

What justification brings

Study 8 | Romans 5:1-11

Summary

5:1-8 – The benefits of justification we have now

vv.1-3a Their description

- v.1 Peace with God
- 2a Access to grace in which we stand
- v.2b Hope of glory
- v.3a Joy within suffering

vv.3b-5 Their growth

Through suffering

- v.3b Suffering makes the justified person more single-mindedly persistent
- v.4a Single-minded persistence produces confidence

Through experience of God

- v.4b This all leads to growth in our hope —
- v.5 which deepens through experience of God's love within through the Spirit

vv.5-8 Their source

- v.6 Christ died when we were meritless
- v.7 The most loving person would not die for an evil person, but
- v.8 that is exactly what Christ did

5:9-11 – The benefits of justification we will have later

- v.9 If Christ died for us, he can 'keep us saved' even through the judgment day.
- v10a For if he died for us when enemies, shall he do less for us as his friends?
- v10b And if he saved us in dying, surely he will keep us safe as he now is living
- v.11 So we joy *now* in light of the future

1. vv. 1-2. List all the benefits which justification brings for us to enjoy.

First, there is **peace with God** (v.1). This is not the same as the peace *of* God (Phil 4:7). The peace of God is having a calm and satisfied frame of heart in the midst of troubles and pressures. But peace *with* God means that there was a state of hostilities between God and us which is now over. The peace *with* God is **peace with regard to God**. It is

objective, and happens whether or not I feel happy and secure. The peace *of* God is peace **with regard to the cares of the world**. It is subjective.

It means that, until salvation, there is a war going on between God and us. When we disobey God, there are two things that happen. You not only break his law, but you assume the *right* or authority to do so — you claim kingship over yourself and your world. But God claims kingship over the same thing. Whenever two parties claim absolute (kingly) control over something, there is a war. In addition, it means God has a problem with us. It is not just that we are hostile to him. Paul told us that God's wrath is upon us (Romans 1). Here we are told that we are "reconciled to God" (v.10), which indicates that his anger is taken away. As we saw in Romans 1, God's anger is not the same as ours. It is not vengeful or vindictive — it is legal. There is a sentence on us and it cannot just be discarded. The debt cannot just be wished away. But Jesus death changed it — for through him "we have the reconciliation."

Second, there is **access to grace in which we stand** (v.2a). The Greek word here means "an introduction." We can only develop a personal relationship with a powerful dignitary if someone who knows us both introduces us. *Access to grace* means we are given a favorable position so as to develop a personal relationship. This goes beyond "peace with God," which was just the cessation of hostility. This is *friendship with God*. We now can go to God continually with our requests and problems and failures and he hears us and relates to us.

Third, there is **the hope of glory of God** (v.2b). This is *a certainty of anticipation of sharing God's future glory*. The word "hope" in English is rather weak. To "hope so" means to want something *without* certainty. But the Greek word underlying it means a conviction. The reason that this benefit comes third is because the more we experience our peace and access with the Father, the more desirous we get to see him face to face and the more certain and thrilled we get with the prospect of glory and heaven. By itself, "heaven" can be an abstract and unappetizing idea — but if you come to taste "access" with God, and you realize how intoxicating it is just to have a couple of drops of his presence on your tongue, you will desire to drink from the fountainhead. That desire, focus, and joyous certainty of the future is called the hope of glory.

Note: These three benefits of justification are just the three tenses of our salvation. When we are in Christ, **our past is redeemed** (our old record of rebellion and sin is put away and we have peace with God), **our present is redeemed** (we have a personal friendship with God), and **our future is redeemed** (we have the promise of glory).

2. vv.9-10. How secure is the future for a Christian, and why? (Guiding question: What do these verses say to the question of whether a Christian can lose his or her salvation?)

Verses 1 and 2 could leave someone with the question, "I know I have friendship with God *now* and when I get to heaven, I will have glory with God *then*, but how do I know I will make it there? How do I know I'll *endure in the meantime*?" But in verses 9-10, Paul assures us that Christ's work for our salvation not only gives us hope for our

ultimate future, but for our immediate future. We are assured that we will be preserved as “saved” throughout our life and through the very day of judgment.

The argument of Paul is very strong. He intertwines two arguments in these two verses. First, if Jesus stayed on the cross and saved us “when we were God’s enemies” (v.10), then “how much more” will he keep us saved now that we are his friends (“justified by blood” – v.9)? If he succeeded to save us when we were hostile to him, could he fail to prevail now that we are friends? If he didn’t give up on you when you were at war with him, what could you do to make him give up on you now that you are at peace with him? (The God’s wrath of v.9 must be his future judgment day wrath, because Christians have already had God’s wrath turned aside. See Romans 3:25-26). Further, if Jesus effected our salvation when he was dead, “how much more” will he keep us saved since he is alive (v.10b)?

It is not until the end of Romans 8 that Paul confronts the issue of “losing salvation” more fully. But here he virtually answers the question indirectly. He says that it is inconceivable that Christ should fail to save us to the end.

3. vv.3-4. How does Paul answer the question: “But what good are these benefits if we are still going to suffer?” Why does Paul say we should rejoice *in* our suffering, not *for* them? How can we rejoice *in* suffering?

Paul anticipates this question immediately in v.3. “*Not only so*, but we rejoice in suffering.” He says in effect, “Not only do we have these joys, but these joys stay joys in our sorrow, and even help us to find joy in our sorrow.”

Paul does not say we rejoice *for* our sufferings, because that would be masochism. It actually is possible to rejoice for suffering. Some people need to feel punished in order to deal with their sense of unworthiness and guilt. Others actually get a superior attitude toward people who have had an easier life. They see them as superficial or ungrateful. It is possible to use suffering as a “work,” another form of justification by works! Some feel that God owes them his favor and acceptance because we have had such a hard life. People who do not “process” their suffering through the gospel of grace can become proud and superior or deeply cynical.

Christians, rather, rejoice *in* suffering. That means there is no joy in the actual troubles themselves. God hates the pain and troubles of this life and so should we. Rather, a Christian knows that suffering will have beneficial results. A Christian is not a stoic that faces suffering with just gritting of teeth. Christians “look through” the suffering to their certainties and rest in the knowledge that our troubles will only serve to increase our enjoyment and appreciation of them.

4. vv. 5-8. By what two ways can we know that God loves us?

Paul again anticipates a question: “How can you really know this hope of glory is right? How can you know you don’t just wish it to be true! How do you know it is?” As we see through the Bible, the Christian’s ground of assurance is two-fold: one is internal and subjective, while one is external and objective. Both are necessary.

First, v.5 tells us that we can know that God loves us because of the experience of his love. “This hope does not disappoint us, for God poured out his love into our hearts.” It comes through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every Christian has some inner experience of the love of God. Paul’s language shows that this can be quite a strong experience, though it can be mild and gentle too, which is more common. The greater your inner experience of love, the greater the assurance and hope and power you have. Generally the people who have the most of this are those who are very experienced and disciplined in prayer, meditation, life-balance, obedience. Some Christians have experienced this assurance very powerfully. For example:

Sometimes our spirits cannot stand in trials. Therefore sometimes the immediate testimony of the Spirit is necessary. It comes saying, “I am thy salvation!” and our hearts are stirred up and comforted with joy inexpressible. This joy hath degrees. Sometimes it is so clear and strong that we question nothing—other times doubts come in soon.

– Richard Sibbes

It is no audible voice, but it is a ray of glory filling the soul with God as life, love and liberty. It is like the word to Daniel that said, “O man greatly beloved!” Or like the word to Mary. The Lord only said her name MARY, and filled her soul so she no longer doubted she was his! Oh, how glorious is this manifestation of the spirit!

– William Guthrie

Second, vv.6-8 tell us that we can know God loved us because of the death of Jesus. Paul makes an argument which we should all have in our minds clearly. It goes like this:

v.7a – “It would take a very loving person to die to save another.”

v.7b – “But even a very loving person would not die for an evil one—a very good one, yes, but an evil or wicked one? No.”

v.8 – “But that is what Jesus Christ did, by the will of the Father. *While we were rebelling, and while we were resisting him, he died for us.*

Therefore — God loves you.

5. v.12 What are the signs that you are rejoicing in your reconciliation?

- A. Your mind is deeply satisfied with the doctrine of justification by faith. You rejoice in it by studying it and speaking it to others.
- B. You only think of your past in terms of it. You don’t say, “What a mess I made of it there!” But you say, “Me a Christian! Despite my deep flaws, despite my record! Yet it is absolutely true!”
- C. When you discover in yourself some surprising new character flaw, a fearfulness, or a lack of self-control, etc., the discovery does not make you doubt God’s love but rather makes you feel closer to him, and his grace for you becomes more precious in your sight.

- D. When your conscience accuses you and says, "How could God love you? After what you've done?" you don't try to answer the conscience with reference to your performance. In other words, you don't say, "I had a bad day!" or "I was under pressure," you say something like: *"Even if I hadn't done this thing, that would not have made me acceptable in his sight anyway! Jesus died for me, and his blood can cover 1,000 worlds filled with people 1,000 times worse than me!"*
- E. When you face criticism, you don't say, "This is totally unfair," but you rejoice gently inside with thoughts like, "Well, I'm really a much worse sinner than they know, but
- Well may the accuser roar,
of sins that I have done!
I know them all and thousands more,
Jehovah knoweth none!"
- F. When you face death, you do it with serenity, because you are going to a friend.

To the leaders. If your people have been given the "Trials and the Gospel: An Exercise" before hand, you can let people share what they have written. If they have not, ask question #1 in the exercise as a discussion question. Then ask people to share personally how they have seen God working in their life through trials as Paul describes in vv.3-5.

EXERCISE

Read the following questions and answers.

Trials and the Gospel

1. vv.3-5. How does Paul tell us suffering can change us?

Remember that Paul is telling us how suffering affects a person *who knows he or she is justified strictly by grace, not works*. In that case, Paul says suffering begins a chain reaction:

1. Suffering leads to “perseverance” (v.3). This is a word that really means single-mindedness. Suffering makes us “focus” — it helps us focus on what is really important. It makes us remember what really is lasting, helps us to re-align priorities, and so on. It removes distractions.
2. “Perseverance” leads to “character.” This is a word that really means “testedness.” It is a quality of confidence that comes from having been through an experience. It only comes from following through, and doing your duty despite it all. But the result is a growing poise that only comes from the experience. For example, a sports team new to the championship playoffs may play poorly because they have not been in the position before. But a “tested” team will have no jitters. They perform well because they have been there before. Notice that without the first step, the second step won’t happen. **Suffering, if it first leads you to focus on God and proper priorities, will lead to greater confidence as you come through it.**
3. All this leads to growth in “hope,” which is a stronger assurance of one’s peace, access and future glory. Paul’s addition of v.5 right after vv.3-4 seems to mean that Christians who a) focus single-mindedly on prayer and obedience to God, and who b) grow in confidence, will c) experience more of his love during suffering. “Poured out his love into our hearts.” Many Christians testify that they feel more of God’s presence and love during suffering, because it makes them focus and trust in him more.

Here’s the amazing assertion of Paul. When he shows that suffering starts a chain reaction that leads to *hope*, which is one of the fruits of justification, he is saying that the benefits of justification are self-propagating. They are not only *not* diminished by suffering, but they are enlarged by suffering. In other words, **if you face suffering with a clear grasp of justification by grace alone, your joy in that grace will deepen**, but (as he implies) **if you face suffering with a mindset of justification by works, the suffering will break you, not make you.**

Consider how people take suffering who are trying to be justified by works. Self-justifiers are always insecure at a deep level because they know they aren’t living up to their standards, but cannot admit it. So when suffering hits, they immediately feel they

are being punished for their sins. They cannot take confidence in God's love (v.5). Since their belief that God loved them was inadequately based anyway, now suffering shatters them. Suffering drives them away from God rather than toward him.

2. Now consider some specific difficulty or trial you have experienced as a Christian. Did you see it doing in you what Paul describes? Why or why not?

Here are some things to consider as you are analyzing your own "case study."

- A. Did it lead you to focus, to *single-mindedness*? Did it help you sift out the unimportant from the important? Did it help you focus attention more on prayer and on what God has done for you?
- B. Has your suffering produced *testedness*? Did you follow through despite fears? In other words, did it bring a kind of maturity and confidence that comes from having been through it all? Are you a less jittery person, a less fearful person?
- C. Did it lead you to actual deeper experience of his presence and his love? Did you find a greater closeness, a sense of nearness?

If your suffering did not lead to this, analyze why:

- 1. **Was it a failure of the will?** Did you simply fail to spend time with God in worship and reflection? Or did you disobey him in some way to escape the hardness of the situation?

Was it a failure of understanding the gospel? Did the suffering make you doubt God's love? That is a natural response, but did you eventually shake that off? The speed with which you do that is an indication of the degree of your understanding of justification. Remember that God can use suffering to "awaken" a person to some sin — as a kind of "intervention." But interventions are only done by people out of love. God can and will treat you roughly if you need it, like a loving parent will do with a wayward child — but all out of deep concern. If you are a Christian, God has sent all your punishment on to Christ. All his wrath for you fell into the heart of Jesus and was swallowed up and absorbed there — it disappeared forever. He has no wrath left for you.

Romans

Why justification comes

Study 9 | Romans 5:12-21

Summary

5:12-14b – The career of the first Adam

We sinned *in* Adam

- v.12a Death only comes to those who are sinners —
- v.12b and we all die because we all sinned when Adam sinned

We sin *without* Adam

- v.13a Sin existed from Adam to Moses before the formal law/10 commands were given.
- v.13b Now people without the law are not as guilty of sin as those with the law
- v.14a but people died just as much before Moses
- v.14b therefore people died for the guilt of Adam's sin.

5:14c-17 – The career of the second Adam

How Adam and Christ are different

- v.14c Adam's action is a "type" of Christ's
- v.15 The salvation brought by one man is much more than the sin brought by one man
- v.16 Christ does not only cover the guilt of Adam's sin, but all other sins too
- v.17 Justice metes out equivalence, but grace overflows far over what is deserved

How Adam and Christ are the same

- v.18 As Adam's sin brought us guilt, so Christ's obedience brings us righteousness
- v.19 More specifically: Adam's one act made us legally sinners (before we act), so Christ's one act makes us legally righteous (before we act).
- v.20 When the formal law came with Moses, sin got more visible and worse, but
- v.21 When Christ came, grace arrives to overwhelm resulting in eternal life

1. v.12 Why the "therefore" in v.12? What is the link to the previous passage?

The previous passage has confidently asserted that Christ had so overcome the barrier between God and us that we have a certainty of glory. Paul knows that is a stupendous claim. He probably is anticipating questions from a "realist," such as: "How can you make such a confident claim in the light of the enormous power of death and sin now in

the world?" Or "How can one person's sacrifice (as noble as it was) bring about such incredible benefits to so many?"

In the following important passage, Paul shows in great detail *how* Jesus' sacrifice could overcome evil. Paul goes on to show that he perfectly understands the radical nature of evil. In fact, he describes (in 5:12-21) the effects of sin in the human race in degrees of depth beyond what anyone would think. But, he says, the reconciliation we have in Christ can and will address the disaster of sin at every point. Not only can Jesus meet the challenge, but he can more than overcome it (v.20). Then he proceeds to show that Jesus has a special relationship to us as did Adam (v.14). And therefore, as Adam's sin transfers to us, Christ's obedience transfers to us.

2. v.12 What do you learn about the relationship of sin and death in this one verse?

In verse 12 we see a 3-stage chain reaction. It describes three stages in human history up until the time of Christ. First, sin entered the world through one man (Adam). Second, death entered the world because of sin, (as a penalty for sin). And third, death spread to all human beings because all sinned. The order is: the entrance of sin, the entrance of death, the spread of universal death because of sin.

3. Read the following note.

The verb in v.12, "because all sinned," is an "aorist" tense. A Greek aorist tense is a past perfect even more definite and strong than our English perfect tense. The aorist always points to a *single past action*. It says that the whole race sinned in one single past action. To use a large collective noun "all" with such a specific verb tense is so awkward that it must be deliberate. If Paul meant "all sinned continually and individually" he would have used the present or the imperfect tense. One author put it this way: "If we are to give the aorist tense its full value [here], and in this argument we must do so, the more precise meaning will be that sin and death entered into the world because all men were guilty of *one act of sin*." (William Barclay, *Expository Times*, LXX (1958-59), p. 192.

How does vv.13-14 demonstrate that all die not because they sinned like Adam, but in Adam?

In verse 13, Paul points out that between the time of Adam and Moses, God had not given out his law in a formal way. He then says, "But sin is not taken into account when there is no law." Now in Romans 2 we saw that there *is* real guilt for people who do not have the formal revealed law of God in the Bible. Let's credit Paul with enough intelligence not to totally contradict himself here. He cannot be saying that the people before the Mosaic law never had any guilt of their own. Why? Because they have the law of God in a rudimentary form written on their heart (Romans 2:12-14).

Therefore, Paul is probably pointing out that **guilt and responsibility greatly increase with knowledge and awareness**. The people who lived before Moses were not

breaking explicit commands (“those who did not sin by breaking a command-v.14b”), as did the people afterwards. Therefore, the guilt of the people after Moses was far greater than the people before. Then Paul says, “nevertheless, death reigned” (v.14a). In other words, though the people were less guilty, they died no less.

We can put the logic this way: disease and death reign just as much over nice people as over cruel people, reign just as much over ignorant people as instructed people, reign just as much over infants (who haven’t disobeyed deliberately) as over evil adults. Paul is saying, if death is the wages of guilt for sin, then why does death reign so universally, regardless of individual sin? His answer — “as did Adam” (v.14b). He is saying, “Maybe they didn’t break a command, but Adam did, and in him we are all guilty. We are guilty for what he did.”

“We cannot point the finger at [Adam] in self-righteous innocence, for we share in his guilt. And it is because we sinned in Adam that we die today.”

– John Stott

4. vv.12-14. Why is this teaching so repugnant to modern people and especially those in the West? Offer and discuss analogies that make it more understandable.

Westerners dislike this teaching because we are highly individualistic. People of other centuries and other cultures are better at accepting the fact of human solidarity. Many other cultures accept the idea that the individual is part of the whole family, tribe, or clan, and is not a whole in and of him or herself.

The idea of solidarity is that **you can have a legitimate relationship with a person so that whatever that person achieves or loses, you achieve or lose.** This is the concept of a representative. A representative involves the represented in the fruits of his/her action, whether for good or ill. This has been called in philosophy and theology, “federal headship.” The word “federal” comes from the Latin *foedus*, “covenant.” A federal head is a person who, through a covenant relationship, *represents*, stands in for someone else.

In the East today, and former times around the world, it was considered legitimate for some people to have this relationship to you by birth or by assignment. In the western world we only recognize the legitimacy of such a person as we voluntarily choose to be in that relationship. Here are some examples:

1. One example is a representative in collective negotiation. If a union would give a representative the right to negotiate and sign a contract on behalf of the union, then he is a “federal head.” (However, most unions insist now on only ratifying such a contract by popular vote, and thus their representatives are not true federal heads.) Sometimes a head of state gives an ambassador the power to negotiate so his/her actions bind the country to the terms of the agreement.
2. Another example is the power given to elected representatives. A national leader (or the legislature) can declare war. This power to declare war does not belong to the people, even in a democracy. People do not vote popularly on whether to declare

war. Why? Such a decision could not be made fast enough, and sufficient information could not be distributed for an intelligent decision. Therefore, our representatives act for us, and the consequences of their action comes to us. If our federal representatives declare war on a country, we can't say, "Well, I'm not at war with this country!" Yes you are. If your representatives declare war, you have declared war.

3. Another example is when a defendant enters into a relationship with legal counsel. The lawyer represents the client in court, and has, literally, "power of attorney" to act for the client in many ways.

Here's a quote from Charles Hodge who discusses Christ's work for us as federal head:

"The relation of Christ to his people is that of a [legal] advocate to his client. The former personates the latter; he puts himself in his client's place. It is, while it lasts, the most intimate relation. The client may not even appear [in court]. He is not heard. He is not regarded. He is lost in his advocate, who for the time being is his representative....He, not we, is seen, heard, and regarded."

When it comes to Romans 5:12-21, the rub for westerners is two-fold. First, we dislike the very idea of someone standing in for us. We say, "That's not fair that I should be judged for what someone else did! I should have had a chance at the probation in the Garden of Eden myself!" But secondly, even if we grant that federal headship sometimes is legitimate, we **dislike the lack of a choice of our federal head**. What immediately strikes us as unfair is that we did not elect Adam as our representative, we had no say in it. If we are going to give someone "power of attorney" or "power of collective bargaining," we want to be able to choose someone who is just like us, who would have all our views and perspectives, but who would be highly gifted and able to represent us well.

But if we think of it this way, we are on the verge of understanding how God did it! First, no one could choose a representative for you as well as God could. We must not think that we could have made a more intelligent selection than God! But second, God did not simply choose Adam, he *created* Adam to be our representative. He was perfectly created and designed *to act exactly as you, personally, as an individual would have acted in the same situation*. You cannot say, "I would have done a better job" because that would be to claim that you could have been or chosen a better representative than God could. No — God was able to give us all probation at once. And so we are guilty in Adam because we actually sinned in him.

Final note: Often the people who are most offended at the doctrine of "federal headship" consider themselves very liberal and open-minded. Yet they refuse to detach themselves in any way from their furious western individualism when they approach this text!

5. What is the similarity between Adam and Christ of which Paul speaks in v.14?

Paul calls Adam a “pattern” of Christ (v.14). The similarity is mainly one — that many people have been involved in one man’s deed. Therefore, both Adam and Christ “stand in representation” to a body of people, and in both cases, the merits or demerits of what they do is *transferred* to us. Paul uses several different words to get this across:

v.16 One sin... *brought* condemnation;
The gift... *brought* justification...

v.18 The *result* of one trespass was condemnation;
The *result* of one act of righteousness was justification

v.19 Through the disobedience of one, the many were *made* sinners; through the obedience of the one, the many will be *made* righteous.

So the similarity is that their action is transferred to us. Adam’s sin “made” us sinners, so Jesus’ act “made” us righteousness. This is a legal transfer — Adam’s guilt to us, then Christ’s righteousness to us.

6. What are the dissimilarities between Adam and Christ that Paul mentions in vv.15-21?

Paul says “the free gift is not like the trespass” (v.15), and then goes on to enumerate them. There are at least three contrasts between Adam and Christ.

1. **The motivation at the heart of the deed was very different.** Paul calls Adam’s deed a “trespass” or sin, but calls Jesus’ deed, the free gift. This means that Adam’s act was a deed of self-aggrandizement as contrasted with Jesus’ act of self-sacrifice. In other words, Jesus deed of dying for us was not simply obedient toward God, but it was undeserved compassion for us. Put another way, Adam’s action was a breaking of the law, but what Jesus did was an “act of righteousness” (v.18) and “obedience” (v.19) — a total fulfillment of the law.
2. **The results of the two deeds are opposite.** The results are at least three:
 - 1.) Adam’s resulted in “*death*” (v.15) while Christ’s results in “*life*.” This is the first of the two consequences of evil listed in the beginning of the passage — physical death. The effects of Christ’s deed undoes the effects of Adam’s.
 - 2.) Adam’s resulted in “*condemnation*” (v.16), and Christ’s in “*justification*.” This is the second of the two consequences of evil listed in the beginning of the passage — legal guilt. The effects of Christ’s deed undoes the effects of Adam’s.
 - 3.) The result of Adam’s sin is that “*death reigns*” (v.17), but Paul doesn’t say that in Christ “*life reigns*” but rather that “*we reign in life*” (v.17). This is another contrast Paul is making. Before, death reigned over us and we were in bondage. Now we are free. The old kingdom under which we labored crushed us — we have not traded one slaver in for another. Rather, in the new kingdom of Christ we become kings ourselves! Christ’s kingship makes us kings, but sin’s kingship makes us slaves. The contrast is total.

3. **The power of the two is different.** Paul is at great pains to show that the power and scope of Christ's work is far greater than Adam's. He keeps saying how much more to show us that Christ's work can overwhelm and completely cover and undo all the effects of Adam's work. The contrast is between "sin" and "grace" or "gift." Our condemnation is an act of justice, and justice metes out equivalence — exactly what is deserved. But our justification is an act of grace, and grace overflows and abounds, giving us 10, 100, 1,000, and infinity of times more than we deserve.

4. There is another contrast between Adam and Christ Paul does not mention here. Our union with Adam as our federal head is physical, but our union with Christ our federal head is by faith. We make the union when we believe in him. This is why Paul can later say, "we died" with Christ to sin and "were raised" with Christ. It is all covenantal language. Once we are united to Christ by faith **whatever is true of him is true of us!**

"So then, whether we are condemned or justified, whether we are spiritually alive or dead, depends on which humanity we belong to — whether we still belong to the old humanity initiated by Adam, or to the new humanity initiated by Christ."

– John Stott

7. "This passage teaches us that, if Christ is our representative, whatever is true of him in God's eyes is true of us"

Do you agree with this statement? If it is true, how would it make a difference to your practical daily life?

TEACHING C

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

How did Jesus win our salvation?

PART I. WHAT HAPPENED ON THE CROSS?

John Stott

We strongly reject, therefore, every explanation of the death of Christ which does not have at its center the principle of ‘satisfaction through substitution.’ The cross was not a commercial bargain with the devil, let alone one which tricked and trapped him; nor an exact equivalent, a quid pro quo to satisfy a code of honor or a technical point of law; nor a compulsory submission by God to some moral authority above him from which he could not otherwise escape; nor a punishment of a meek Christ by a harsh and punitive Father; nor a procurement of salvation by a loving Christ from a mean and reluctant Father; nor an action of the Father which bypassed Christ as Mediator. Instead, the righteous, loving Father humbled himself to become in and through his only Son flesh, sin and a curse for us, in order to redeem us without compromising his own character. The theological words ‘satisfaction’ and ‘substitution’ need to be carefully defined and safeguarded, but they cannot in any circumstances be given up. The biblical gospel of atonement is of God satisfying himself by substituting himself for us.

The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.

Swami Vivekananda

[Before the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893] The Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God; the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth, sinners? It is a sin to call a man a sinner. It is a standing libel on human nature.

Emil Brunner

All other forms of religion — not to mention philosophy — deal with the problem of guilt apart from the intervention of God, and therefore they come to a ‘cheap’ conclusion. Man is spared the final humiliation of knowing that the Mediator must bear the

punishment instead of him. To this yoke he need not submit. He is not stripped absolutely naked.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

[Two] things show the infinity of his sufferings:

1. Who it was who forsook him. Not his people Israel — not Judas the betrayer — not Peter his denier... Ah! It was his Father and his God. Other things little affected him compared with that. The passers-by wagged their heads — he spoke not. The chief priests mocked him — he murmured not... [But] God brought darkness... over his soul. Ah — this was infinite agony: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

2. What God did to him... Dear friends, let us look into this ocean through which Christ waded. (1) He was without any comforts of God — no feeling that God loved him — no feeling that God pitied him — no feeling that God supported him. God was his sun before — now that sun became all darkness. Not a smile from his Father — not a kind look — not a kind word. (2) He was without a God — he was as if he had no God. All that God had been to him before, was taken from him now. He was Godless — deprived of his God. (3) He had the feeling of the condemned, when the Judge says: “Depart from me, ye cursed,” “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.” He felt that God said the same to him. Ah! this is the hell which Christ suffered. Dear friends, I feel like a little child casting a stone into some deep ravine in the mountain side, and listening to hear its fall — but listening all in vain... it is too deep — the longest line cannot fathom it. The ocean of Christ’s sufferings is unfathomable... He was forsaken in the [place] of sinners. If you close with him as your surety, you will never be forsaken. From the broken bread and the poured out wine seems to rise the cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” For me — for me.

Jonathan Edwards

[On Jesus’ experience of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, before he died.]

The sorrow and distress which his soul then suffered arose from that lively, and full, and immediate view which he had then given him of that cup of [God’s] wrath... that dreadful cup, which was vastly more terrible than Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. He then had a near view of that furnace of wrath into which he was to be cast; he was brought to the mouth of the furnace that he might look into it, and stand and view its raging flames, and see the glowings of its heat, that he might know where he was going and what he was about to suffer. This was the thing that filled his soul with sorrow and darkness, this terrible sight, as it were, overwhelmed him. For what was the human nature of Christ to such a mighty wrath as this? It was in itself, without the supports of God, but a feeble worm of the dust, a thing that was crushed before the moth...

God brought the cup that he was to drink, and set it down before him, that he might have full view of it and see what it was before he took it. If Christ had not fully known what the dreadfulness of these sufferings was, before he took them upon him, his taking them would not have been fully his own act... but when he had seen what they were... so his love for sinners... was the more wonderful, as also his obedience to God in it... For the place where he was... was a lonesome, solitary place; and it was the night season, so that he might have gone from that place.

[It is as if God were saying]: "There is the furnace into which you are to be cast, if they are to be saved; either they must perish, or you must endure this for them... What will you do? Is your love such that you will go on? Will you cast yourself into this dreadful furnace of wrath?" And he did not say within himself, "Why should I, who am so great and glorious a person, infinitely more honorable than all the angels of heaven, why should I go to plunge myself into such dreadful, amazing torments... for them who can never requite me for it... for them who have no love to me?"...But on the contrary, his love held out, and he resolved... to take the cup and drink it.

[Now] if only the foresight of the cup was so dreadful, how dreadful was the cup itself, how far beyond all that can be uttered or conceived?

Martin Luther

All the prophets did foresee in spirit, that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, etc. that ever was... for he being made a sacrifice, for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins... Our most merciful Father... sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him the sins of all men, saying, "Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer..." Here now cometh the Law and saith: "I find him to be a sinner... therefore let him die upon the cross..."

George Herbert – Excerpts from "The Sacrifice"

[A poem imagining the words of Jesus as he watches himself betrayed, arrested, tortured, and killed.]

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,
 Who am the Way and Truth, the true relief;
 Most true to those, who are my greatest grief:
 Was ever grief like mine?
 See, they lay hold on me, not with the hands
 Of faith, but furie: yet at their commands
 I suffer binding, who have loosed their bands:

Was ever grief like mine?
Arise, arise, they come. Look how they run!
Alas! what haste they make to be undone!
How with their lanterns do they seek the sun!
Was ever grief like mine?
Therefore my soul melts, and my heart's dear treasure
Drops blood (the only beads) my word to measure:
"O let this cup pass, if it be thy pleasure":
Was ever grief like mine?
These drops being tempered with a sinners tears
A balsome are for both the hemispheres:
Curing all wounds, but mine; all, but my fears:
Was ever grief like mine?
So sits the earths great curse in Adams fall
Upon my head: so I remove it all
From th' earth unto my brows, and bear the thrall:
Was ever grief like mine?
The soldiers also spit upon that face,
Which angels did desire to have the grace,
And prophets, once to see, but found no place:
Was ever grief like mine?
"O all ye who pass by, behold and see";
Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree;
The tree of life to all, but only me:
Was ever grief like mine?
Such sorrow as, if sinful man could feel,
Or feel his part, he would not cease to kneel,
Till all were melted, though he were all steel:
Was ever grief like mine?
"Now heal thy self, Physician; now come down."
Alas! I did so, when I left my crown
And fathers smile for you, to feel his frown:
Was ever grief like mine?
In healing not my self, there doth consist
All that salvation, which ye now resist;
Your safety in my sickness doth subsist:
Was ever grief like mine?
Betwixt two thieves I spend my utmost breath,
As he that for some robbery suffereth.
Alas! what have I stolen from you? Death.
Was ever grief like mine?
But now I die; now all is finished.
My woe, man's weal: and now I bow my head.
Only let others say, when I am dead,
Never was grief like mine.

PART II. ALTERNATE VIEWS OF THE CROSS

D.M. Lloyd-Jones

People say that this whole notion of the cross is immoral. To them, the idea that one man should be punished for other people's sin is immoral. The whole notion is quite unthinkable. A man bears his own punishment [they say]... They say they cannot believe in a God who does a thing like that, a God who can punish his own Son... it is not justice. They say it violates their sense of justice and morality.

J.I. Packer

If you look at the RSV or the NEB [translations of the Bible] at the four texts quoted [Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 2:17; I John 2:1; 4:8-10] you will see these versions replace the thought of propitiation with "expiation." What is the difference? The difference is that expiation only means half of what propitiation means. Expiation is an action that has sin as its object; it denotes covering, putting away, or rubbing out of sin so that it no longer constitutes a barrier to friendly fellowship between man and God. Propitiation, however, in the Bible, denotes all that expiation means, and the pacifying of the wrath of God thereby. So, at any rate, Christian scholars have maintained since the Reformation, when these things first began to be studied with precision, and the case can still be made compellingly today (see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*).

But in this century a number of scholars, notably Dr. C.H.Dodd, have revived the view of the sixteenth century Unitarian Socinus, a view which had already been picked up in the late nineteen-hundreds by Albrecht Ritschl, the founder of German liberalism, to the effect that there is in God no such thing as anger occasioned by human sin, and consequently no need to possibility of propitiation.

Note now, three facts about propitiation as Paul describes it: 1) Propitiation is the work of God Himself. In paganism, man propitiates his gods, and religion becomes a form of commercialism and, indeed, of bribery. In Christianity, however, God propitiates His wrath by His own action. "He set forth Jesus Christ," says Paul, "to be a propitiation..." 2) Propitiation was made by the death of Jesus Christ... When Paul tells us that God set forth Jesus to be a propitiation "by his blood." ...he points to the death of Jesus as the atoning event, and explains the atonement in terms of representative substitution — the innocent taking the place of the guilty. 3) Propitiation manifests God's righteousness. So far from calling into question the morality of God's way of dealing with sin, says Paul, the truth of propitiation establishes it... "to show his righteousness... that he might be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

PART III. WHAT DID THE WHOLE WORK OF CHRIST ACHIEVE?

Meredith G. Kline

Recounted in the lore about the founding of [Westminster Seminary] is the stirring testimony of the dying Machen in a telegram sent to John Murray: "I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." The active obedience of Jesus is his fulfilling the demands of the covenant probation. By the passive obedience of his atoning sacrifice he secures for us the forgiveness of sins. But he does more than clear the slate and reinstate us into Adam's original condition, still facing probation and able to fail. Jesus, the second Adam, accomplishes the probationary assignment of overcoming the devil, and by performing this one decisive act of righteousness he earns for us God's promised reward. By this achievement of active obedience he merits for us a position beyond probation, secure forever in God's love and the prospect of God's eternal home.

This grand truth... is based on the biblical teaching about the two Adams whose responses under covenant probation are imputed to those they represent. Thus, God imputes... the righteousness of... his active obedience... Here was Machen's strong comfort in death. He knew that the meritorious work performed by his Savior had been reckoned to his account as if he had performed it. God must certainly bestow on him the glorious heavenly reward, for Jesus had earned it for him and God's name is just.

J. Gresham Machen

[The] covenant of works was a probation. If Adam had kept the law of God for a certain period, he was to have eternal life. If he disobeyed, he was to have death. Well, he disobeyed, and the penalty of death was inflicted upon him and his posterity. Then Christ by his death on the cross paid that penalty...

Well and good, but if that is all Christ did for us, do you not see that we should be back in just the situation in which Adam was before he sinned? The penalty of his sinning would have been removed from us because it had all been paid by Christ. But for the future the attainment of eternal life would have been dependent upon our perfect obedience to the law of God. We should simply have been back in the probation again.

As a matter of fact, [Christ] has not merely paid the penalty of Adam's first sin (and the penalty of the sins which we individually have committed), but also he has positively merited for us eternal life. He was, in other words, our representative both in the penalty paying and in probation keeping. He paid the penalty [of failed probation] for us, and he stood the probation for us... [Christ not only took the punishment by his death], but merited for them the reward by his perfect obedience to God's law... Those are the two things he has done for us.

How shall we distinguish Christ's active obedience [keeping God's law] from his passive obedience [paying the penalty]? Shall we say that He accomplished His active obedience by His life and accomplished his passive obedience by His death? No... during every moment of his life upon earth Christ was engaged in passive obedience —

it was all for him humiliation, was it not? It was all suffering. It was all part of his payment of the penalty of sin. On the other hand... his death... was the crown of that obedience to the law of God by which he merited eternal life for those whom He came to save... Every event of his life was part of his payment of the penalty of sin, and every event... was part of that glorious keeping of the law of God by which He earned for his people the reward of eternal life. The two aspects of his work are inextricably intertwined... Together they constitute the wonderful, full salvation which was wrought for us by Christ our Redeemer.

Adam before he fell was righteous in the sight of God, but he was still under the possibility of becoming unrighteous. Those who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ not only are righteous in the sight of God but they are beyond the possibility of becoming unrighteous. In their case, the probation is over... because Christ has stood it for them.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

I have often explained to you how the Lord Jesus Christ came to be a doing as well as a dying Saviour — not only to suffer all that we should have suffered, but to obey all that we should have obeyed — not only to suffer the curse of the law, but to obey the commands of the law... The night before, he said: "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" But perhaps he will shrink back when he comes to the cross? No; for three hours the darkness has been over him, yet still he says: "My God, my God." ...The great command was laid upon him to die for sinners... Sinner, do you take Christ for your surety? See how fully he obeyed for thee!... Ah! then you are complete in him!... All the merit of his holy obedience is imputed to you.

Redeemer Teaching

When we believe in him, we are in a special relationship to him — he is our "legal proxy," our "federal head," our "covenant representative" our "forensic substitute." This means that whatever he achieves and loses we by definition also achieve or lose, as if we had done all he had done. In two major ways, there is a legal linkage between Christians and Christ.

- 1) Then, on the cross, our sins were imputed to him. He died and was punished for them, and now we are as free from them as if we had paid them, in fact — we are as free from them as if we had already spent eternity in hell, for he did!
- 2) And now, when we believe, he stands in heaven "on our behalf,," and his righteous life is what the Father sees when he sees us. So not only are our sins imputed to him, his righteousness is imputed to us. Thus we are as honored and loved by the Father as if we had done all the wonderful deeds of love and courage and had accomplished the perfect record of faithfulness that Jesus did. This "double imputation" doctrine is taught in Romans 5:12-19.

PART IV. – THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS

D.M. Lloyd-Jones

Nothing so hurts the natural man's pride as the cross of Christ. How does it do this?... [The cross] says that we are all equally failures.

Have you ever felt the offense of the cross, my friend? Have you resented being told that your condition is such that nothing you can do can ever put it right? Have you been able to hear that without feeling the offense? If you have, I would say that you have never heard it properly... The modern man, the natural man, hates this. It is the opposite of his cult of self-expression and belief in himself, of working himself up psychologically, of trusting himself, and of trusting his own innate powers. Modern man considers himself come of age, able to stand on his own feet, with all his tremendous knowledge. But here is something that demolishes it all. The cross says that it is useless and of no value at all. That is the offense of the cross.

The Christian, by contrast, is one who glories in the cross... He does not merely say that he admires it... he does not merely accept its message intellectually... he rejoices in it. The word that the apostle actually uses [in Galatians 6:14] is a very strong one. He says, 'God forbid that I should boast, save in the cross of Christ...' It is a matter of boasting... It means that to him there is nothing which comes anywhere near it in significance. It means that he rests everything upon this, that this means all to him, that he is what he is because of this.

A summary of what we've learned about the Gospel

Legalism	Gospel Christianity	Liberalism
God is holy	God is holy AND love	God is love
We are sinful; have to earn it	We are sinful and accepted	God accepts all
Earn your righteousness	Receive God's perfect righteousness	You don't need perfect righteousness
Matter is bad; we are fallen (Asceticism)	Matter is good yet we are fallen (Physical enjoyment; yet simple living)	Matter is good; we aren't fallen (Satisfy physical appetites)
Culture worships tradition or race (Fascism)	Culture worships God (Sin: thus don't idealize state, individual, or racial heritage)	Culture worships individual or state (Socialism)
Sin only effects individual just do evangelism	Sin effects both individual and social systems — do both evangelism and social action	Naive about depth of human sin — just social action
People can't change (OR change is easy!)	People can change but no quick fixes	People don't need to change
Go into guilt (work it off)	Go through guilt (rest in Christ)	Go away from guilt (convince that its OK)
Repents of sins	Repents of sins AND righteousness	Repents of neither

Romans

Union with Christ

Study 10 | Romans 6:1-14

Summary

6:1 – The 1st question:

“Does the message of salvation-by-grace-alone lead you to stay unchanged morally?”

6:2-10 Answer part #1 – “No — the gospel gives you *knowledge* of your new status with regard to sin”

- v.2 We died to sin when we became Christians.
- vv.3-5 “We know” that when we were baptized with Christ we died with him so we could live a new life.
- vv.6-7 “We know” that our old self was put away so that sin’s influence in us would be nullified
- vv.8-10 “We know” that the power of Christ’s resurrection will also triumph in us.

6:11-14 – Answer part #2 – “No — the gospel gives you *power* over sin as well.

- v.11 Though you know you are dead to sin, you must treat yourself as dead to sin
- vv.12-13 Now you can obey sin OR obey God, so obey God
- v.14 Since you are not under the law anymore, sin’s mastery over you will be broken

1. Why does Paul pose the question in v.1? And what new subject will it help Paul introduce in the next chapters?

The gospel of “received righteousness” (as opposed to “earned righteousness”) is radical — it says our moral efforts cannot contribute one bit to our salvation. This message is unique and unparalleled among world religions and philosophies. Paul knows from lots of experience that a question immediately comes up in any discussion of this gospel; if our good deeds are “worthless” for earning our salvation, why be good at all? If the gospel says: “You are saved by grace, not by a good life,” won’t that message leave the recipient morally unchanged? In sum: Paul is asking, “**Does the gospel message lead you to change the sinful patterns in your life? And if it does so, how does it do so?** Won’t the message just encourage us to keep on sinning, so grace will keep on covering?”

In one sense, Paul's answer to this question is not a detour or a digression. In the critics' objection to justification there is embedded a fundamental understanding of the doctrine. Paul's essential answer is, "You can only say a thing like that if you do not understand the teaching. If you understood the teaching of the gospel, you would not draw deductions like that." It leads him to simply re-apply and explain the doctrine of justification and of our union with Christ (5:12-21).

Yet in another sense, this does introduce a new section. It leads Paul to discuss how the gospel *does* lead to a holy and changed life. In other words, chapters 1-5 explained what God has accomplished for us in the gospel, but chapters 6-8 tell us what God will accomplish *in* us through the gospel. These chapters tell us how to "experience" the gospel. They tell us **how the gospel is dynamite that produces deep and massive changes in our actual character and behavior.**

2. v.2 – What does it mean that we "died to sin?"

This phrase is crucial to the whole chapter, for Paul re-states it repeatedly.

A. Typical inadequate answers:

1. "Died to sin" **means we no longer want to sin**; sin has no more power or influence over us. But if this were the true meaning, Paul would not have had to write 6:12-14. If a Christian doesn't want to sin, why urge him/her not to? Also, 7:18 shows that a Christian still has lots of sinful desires.
2. "Died to sin" **means we no longer ought to sin**; sin is now inappropriate to the Christian. But as the first interpretation goes too far, this one doesn't go far enough. Paul says boldly *we died* not *we ought to die*.
3. "Died to sin" **means we are slowly moving away from sin**; sin is weakening in us. But the term "dead" that Paul uses surely means something stronger than that. Besides, the Greek tense used on this verb is the aorist tense. That refers to a single, past, once-and-done action. Paul is not referring to a continual process.
4. "Died to sin" means **we have renounced sin**; at some moment (such as our baptism) we disavowed sinful behavior. This is unlikely, because vv.3-5 explain that this "death" is the result of our union with Christ. It is the result of something done *to* us, not something we have done.
5. "Died to sin" means **we are no longer guilty of sin**; that our sins cannot condemn us, for they are pardoned in Christ. That is true, but that probably is not the meaning here. The question before Paul is: "If guilt for your sin is totally gone, what incentive does anyone have for *living* without sin?" So Paul is trying to explain how the gospel effects the way we live.

B. Answer: the moment you become a Christian, you are no longer under the "reign" or "ruling power" of sin. Explanation:

This is the same as saying (6:14) that sin does not have the "mastery" over us because we are "under grace!" This is the same as saying (6:12) that we no longer have to obey

sin, and thus it no longer reigns. "Let not sin reign...that you obey its evil desires." Paul has just said in 5:21 that, "Sin reigned... so also grace might reign." In other words, sin still has power, but it no longer can force its dictates on you. In 1:18-32 Paul says that outside of Christ we are "given up" to our sinful desires. Previously, those sinful desires so reigned and ruled over us that we could not see them as sinful, and thus we could not resist them. We were completely under their control. Now however, sin no longer can domineer us. We have the ability now to resist and rebel against their dictates.

Compare v.2 with these texts: Col.1:13 – "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." Acts 26:18 – "...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."

This does not mean that sin is no longer within you, or that it has no more influence and power within you. It does. But sin no longer can *dictate* to you. Verse 7 says, "Anyone who has died has been freed from sin." It means that, though you *may* obey it, and though (the Bible predicts) you *will* obey it, the fact remains that you no longer *have* to obey it.

" — the moment we become Christians we are dead, completely dead, to the *reign* of sin. We are out of sin's territory altogether... But now I imagine somebody putting forward an objection: 'How can you possibly say such a thing? We still sin, we still feel the power of temptation and the power of sin; how therefore can you say honestly that you are dead to the rule and to the reign and to the whole dominion of sin?' I answer this way. We must differentiate between what is true of our position as a fact and our experience... what he says is that every person in the world at this minute is either under the reign and rule of sin or else under the reign and rule of grace... It is either one or the other, he cannot have a foot in each position... [Why?] He is either 'in Adam' or 'in Christ'."

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

3. What are the signs that a person is no longer under the "mastery" (v.14) and the "reign" (v.12) of sin?

It is easy to assume that the "reign of sin" refers to blatant, violent, obvious sins. But a life of outward morality, and interest in Bible study, an enjoyment of religious duties may all be present and sin still be reigning! The sign that sin's mastery is broken: *We no longer "live in sin"* (v.2b). What does that mean?

Paul says that if we "died to sin," we can no longer "live in it." Some people have believed that this refers to sinning at all. That is, some interpret Paul to be saying, "since we are now Christians, we don't sin any longer." In fact, there is a statement in I John 3:9 that reads, "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin." But elsewhere John says that *no* Christian can ever claim to be without sin (1:8), and we will see that Paul still describes Christians as having sin (7:18). Sin still has power in us.

To “live in it” probably means something like “to swim in it” or “to breathe its air” or “to let it be the main tenor of your life.” Thus, to “live in sin” would then mean things like:

- a) To tolerate it. Christians may sin, but the sin grieves and repulses them. This very grief and distaste is a sign that sin does not have dominion. Sin can only completely dupe you if you can’t see it for what it is.
- b) To make no progress with it. Paul means Christians can no longer “practice sin habitually” or “practice it unremittently” without diminishment. When Christians do give in to sinning, they cannot remain there permanently. The distaste and disease of sin drives them out again.

In summary, Paul is not saying that Christians cannot commit individual acts of sin, nor even that they cannot struggle with habitual sins. He is saying that they cannot go on abiding and remaining in the realm of sin. They cannot continue in it deliberately, without distaste or diminishment.

4. vv.3-5 How does Paul show that salvation through union with Christ necessarily leads to a changed life moving away from sin?

v.3 – “We know” that we were baptized into his death in order to live a new life. Paul is thinking of baptism in the mode of immersion. The Greek word *baptizo* was often used to refer to being drowned or sunk, and thus had connotations of death. Yet (notice), *water is not actually mentioned here*. Paul is referring to the spiritual reality to which water baptism points. Paul has already taught us in 5:12-21 that we are in *union* with Christ. When we believe, we are legally united to Christ, so that whatever is true of him is now legally true of us. Since Christ died, and dead people are freed from sin, so we are freed from sin.

v.4 – But our union with Christ doesn’t stop there. Since Christ’s death led to his resurrection and a new life in the same way, our union with Christ *must* lead to a new life. If we believe in Christ, a change of life *will* happen, we will not live in sin anymore.

v.5 – Paul says that the “new life” we live now points forward to the future state of perfect glory which we shall enter. We will certainly be united with him in his resurrection. The word “certainly” flows from our union with him.

Summary: Because we are not saved by our works, but by with union with Christ, therefore **all the things that happened to Christ must happen to us, including his perfect new life without sin!** Anyone who understands the gospel truly will see this necessary result.

5. v.6 Paul says our “old self” has been killed so that the “body of sin might be done away with.” What do you think he means?

[Note: This is a fairly difficult interpretative issue that divides even the best Biblical commentators. Therefore, let your people wrestle with the question for a while and get their best insights, but don’t go on too long. You may have to just share the following with them to give them one working solution to the problem.]

There are some who teach that the “old self” and the “body of death” are the same thing. They think that the “old self was crucified” means that it is dying slowly. But every other place that this word “crucified” is used in Romans, it means simply to be killed. Therefore, Paul is saying, “the ‘old self’ was killed in order to also get rid of the ‘body of death’.” Thus these are two different entities.

What is “the body of sin?” Some think it refers to the “flesh,” the sinful heart. But later in this chapter, Paul says, “let not sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (v.12). Paul is not saying that the physical body is sinful in itself or that physical desires are sinful desires as such. There is nothing inherently sinful about eating or sex, etc. No. Rather, the “body of sin” is the *body controlled by sin*. Thus “the body of sin” is *sin expressing itself through our bodies, or sin reigning in us by getting us to obey its dictates*.

Yet the “old self” is dead and gone. What is this? Two commentators:

“Our ‘old man’ is the old self or ego, the unregenerate man in his entirety in contrast with the new man as the regenerate man in his entirety.”

– John Murray

“The vital distinction [between the ‘old self’ and the ‘body of sin’] is the distinction between ‘I myself as a [whole] personality’ and ‘my body’.”

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones

Paul is saying here the same thing he says later in 7:22-23 – “In my inner being, I delight in God’s law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind.” There in chapter 7 he says that in his inmost self, sin has been overthrown. He now loves God’s law and understands sin and hates it. Yet there is still an influence of sin in him that often still puts forth its power and leads him to give his body over to doing sinful things. That is almost certainly what Paul means here in 6:6. A Christian’s “old self” is gone completely. The old “ego,” the old self-understanding, the old stance of the whole person toward God and the world — all that is gone. As a Christian “I,” my truest self, really seeks God and loves his law and holiness. While sin remains in me, with a lot of strength, it no longer controls the personality and life. It is still able to lead us to disobey God — *but now, sinful behavior goes against our deepest self-understanding*.

Here is an illustration that may help: If a wicked military force had complete control of a country, and a good army invaded, the good army could throw the wicked force out of power, and give the capital and the seat of government and communication back to the people. But the out-of-power soldiers could still live out in the bush as a guerrilla force and create much havoc for the new government. It could often impose its will on the country by sheer force, even though it could never get the power back.

Summary: When I united with Christ, my old sin-controlled self was permanently abolished, and sin no longer has the power to force me to do its will. I am dead to the realm of sin. In myself I am perfect in Christ, raised and seated in the heavenly places. I am no longer the person I once was. I am a new person in Christ. *But* there is still sin as a power within me, and if I allow it, it can still draw me to disobey God.

6. One wrote: "If I fall into sin, it is because I do not realize who I am or what has been done for me in Christ." How does vv.3-10 support this assertion?

All through this passage, Paul repeatedly says, "For we *know*" or "now... we believe" (vv.3,6,8,9). This shows that any Christian who continues to sin or falls back into sin has failed to "know" or think out the implications of what has happened to him/her in Christ. How can we use this approach on our sin? (This is not stoicism — "just say NO!") Paul is showing us here that sinning comes from a lack of understanding and rehearsing our position and a lack of reflection and rejoicing. We could think like this:

- A. **We are bought with Christ's blood**, and if we remember that, we will not treat ourselves as if we belong to ourselves. We owe Jesus Christ our lives and salvation, and we cannot live in disregard to his will.
- B. **We have been delivered out of the "dominion" of sin.** This means the Spirit of God is within us and though sin may seem too powerful to resist, that is not the case. We are children of God, and we can exercise our authority over our sinful desires.
- C. **We were saved by Christ specifically so we would not sin.** Titus 2:14 says, "Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Now if all the suffering and torture of Jesus was for that reason, any Christian who gives in to sin is forgetting that. We should ask ourselves, "Will I defile the heart Christ died to wash? Will I trample on the very purpose of his pain and will I thwart the very goal of his suffering?"

Paul seems to be saying that if you can see and think about these things and still sin, it shows that you don't understand the gospel, that your "old self" was never crucified, that you are still thinking and looking at life the old way!

So we see that the gospel gives us a *new* and *different* incentive for godly living than we had when we were under the law as a system for salvation. When we were using the law to save ourselves, our motive for being obedient was fear and self-confidence. Now, however, we know that Jesus died for us so that we wouldn't sin. When we realize the design of the death of Christ as we think of it in gratitude, we find a new incentive to be holy! (6:13 – "But yield yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.")

7. vv.11-14. a) Why MUST we "count ourselves dead" if we already are? b) How does being "not under the law" help us break the power of sin in our lives?

- a) Being "dead to sin" or "no longer under the dominion of sin," is like a privilege or a legal right. Though it may be true or in force, a person may not realize or utilize the privilege. One example: you may have a trust fund put into you name, but unless you draw on it, it won't change your actual financial condition. The trust fund *should* mean the end of your financial troubles, but it won't have that effect unless it is

used. Thus, we *must* “count ourselves” dead to sin, because unless we act on this great privilege, it will not automatically be realized in our experience. We have to appropriate it.

Here is a vital illustration that depicts our condition:

There is all the difference in the world between being in a given position and realizing you are in that position... Take the case of those poor slaves in the United States of America about a hundred years ago. There they were in a condition of slavery. Then the Civil War came, and as the result of that war, slavery was abolished in the United States. But what had actually happened? All slaves, young and old, were given their freedom, but many of the older ones who had endured long years of servitude found it very difficult to understand their new status. They heard the announcement that slavery was abolished and that they were free: but hundreds, not to say thousands, of times in their after-lives and experiences many of them did not realize it, and when they saw their old master coming near them they began to quake and tremble, and to wonder whether they were going to be sold... You can still be a slave experientially, even when you are no longer a slave legally... **Whatever you may feel, whatever your experience may be, God tells us here, through his Word, that if we are in Christ we are no longer in Adam, we are no longer under the reign and rule of sin... And if I fall into sin, as I do, it is simply because I do not realize who I am... Realize it! Reckon it!**

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

- b) This is something we will deal with more next week. But here’s a start. Verse.14 shows us that to be “under sin” is the same as being “under law” (cf. 5:20-21 with 6:14). Verse 14 tells us that it is our freedom from the law as a salvation-system that makes us free from the mastery of sin over us. (“Sin *shall* not have mastery over you, for you are not under law...”) Why? It is only as we break away from works-righteousness that the power of sin is really broken.

We are righteous in God’s sight and if we remember this, the *motives* for our sin will be undermined. Individual sinful acts have sinful motivations. When we ask *why* we are moved to particular sins, we discover that our sins come because we still seek to find our “justification” (our identity, our sense of worthiness) in other things. Thus, to remember that we are completely loved and righteous in Christ undermines and saps our motives and desires for sin.

Romans

Servants of God

Study 11 | Romans 6:15 – 7:6

SUMMARY

(Recap) 6:1-14

- v.1 **Question:** Does the gospel (the message you are saved by “abounding grace alone”) leave you without the incentive or power to change sinful life patterns?
- vv.2-14 **Answer: On the contrary, the gospel gives us both knowledge and power to change our character and behavior.**

Romans 6:15-7:6

- 6:15 **Question:** Does the gospel (the message you are no longer “under the law”) leave you free to live in any way you choose?
- 6:16-23 **Answer #1** – No! You can be either a slave of sin OR a servant of God — but no one is free.
- v.16 *Everyone’s a slave to something!*
- vv.17-23 Two kinds of bond-service: sin and God
- vv.17-18 How each starts
- v.19 How each develops
- vv.20-23 The results of each
- 7:1-6 **Answer #2** – No! You can be either married to the law OR married to Christ — but no one is free.
- vv.1-3 Illustration: Wives are bound to their husbands until freed by death
- vv.4-6 Application: We are married to Christ! So we are not (like all married persons) bound with the cords of love: not fear.
- v.4 How each starts
- vv.5-6 The results of each

1. v.15 – Put Paul’s question in your own words. Is his question of v.15 identical to his question of 6:1? What issue is he now addressing?

“If we are not ‘under the law’, as we said in 6:14, does that mean we are free to live in any way we choose?”

“If the law of God is no longer the way we are saved, are we thus under no obligation to live a holy life?”

Although the questions of v.1 and v.15 are very similar, they are not identical. In v., Paul is asking very generally, “If we are saved by grace alone, shall we go on sinning?” In vv.1-14, he explains that the gospel gives us a *new* and *different* incentive for godly living than we had when we were under the law as a system for salvation. *When we realize the design of the death of Christ as we think of it in gratitude — we find a new incentive to be holy.* It is not fear and self-confidence, but gratitude and love. He ends this section by saying (6:14), “We are not under the law, but under grace.”

Verse 14 leads directly to the question of v.15. If we are no longer under the law as a system of salvation, are we under any obligation at all? Can we do whatever we choose? Do we have to obey the 10 commandments any more? Paul here is beginning to address an extremely practical question: *What now is a Christian’s motivation and understanding of obligation in day to day living?* For example, are Christians *obligated* to have a “quiet time” (daily devotions). *Why* does a Christian get up in the morning to pray? What is the inner motivation that leads to self control now that we aren’t “under law,” not afraid that God will cast us off because of moral failure? This is a most practical subject!

2. vv.16-18 – What (in these verses) is the main argument brought against the notion that Christians are free to sin?

The essential elements of Paul’s argument: a) When you offer yourselves to someone to obey... you are slaves to the one whom you obey; b)whether slaves to sin... or to obedience.

a) Paul says first that *no* one is free, that everyone is a slave to something or someone! Everyone *is offering themselves* to “someone.” Everyone lives for something, we “offer” ourselves as sacrifices on *some* altar, we are all serving some cause, some “bottom line,” and *that something becomes a master and we its slaves.* A classic quote (used in the leaders’ notes of Study 2):

“Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives.”

– Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*

Paraphrasing this quote in terms of our text, we say we “offer ourselves” whatever we “seek” as our highest good in life, whether power or acceptance or some cause. Then we become “slaves” of whatever that may be. Thus, no one is in control of his or her life — we are controlled by that to which we have offered ourselves.

But you say, “I’m not religious.” ...but *everybody’s* religious. What is your religion? Well, your religion is what you rely upon... Your religion... is what you live for, is what you hope for... Your god is that to which you give yourself, you give your time, attention, your greatest thought, your money — you live for it. It is the thing that keeps you going... It is what you turn to when life gets so hard. *Everybody has a religion.* But the question is – what *is* your religion?”

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones, A sermon on Jer. 2 “Fake Religion”

[Note: You may wish to review notes from Study 2 regarding Paul's teaching on idolatry in Romans 1:18ff. In 6:15-23 and in chapter 7 Paul is showing how the theology of chapter 1 works itself out in practical, personal experience. Every human being is involved in "covenant service" with something; we are all bond-servants to some god, we all worship something. We all feel "pulled" and "controlled" by directives and orders coming deep from within. We are all yielding our bodies to some inner lord which then works its will out in the world through our bodies.]

b) Beyond that, Paul says that there are fundamentally only two kinds of masters or categories of slavery; we either are slaves of God or slaves of sin. To be a slave of sin is truly slavery indeed, for it leads to death. To be a slave of God leads to *righteousness* — love, joy, peace, self-control, kindness.

So Paul's main argument is this: *Anyone who wonders if a Christian can now sin is ignorant about the enslaving nature of sin.* Put another way: a Christian does not have to obey the 10 commandments in order to be saved, but a Christian does have to obey the 10 commandments in order to be a free (and thus godly) human being. If you don't obey the law of God, you become a slave to selfishness, sin.

3. vv.16-23 How do the only two possible "slaveries" compare or contrast in a) their origin, b) their development, c) their results?

The only two masters:

	– A –	– B –
v.16	"slaves... of sin"	"slaves... of obedience"
vv.17-18	"slaves of sin"	"slaves of righteousness"
vv.20-22	"slaves of sin"	"slaves of God"

a) Origin vv.17-18. Their origins are a *contrast*.

A. v.17a – "Though you used to be slaves of sin." The tense of this verb is imperfect, which shows us that slavery to sin is what we are by nature. It begins automatically, we are born into it.

B. v.17b – "But thanks be to God... you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching." This tells us that slavery to God begins when we are converted. Notice the four elements that come together to bring us into this new condition.

1. **Form of teaching** means the conversion begins with a body of truth, a specific message with a specific content that has to be received. This always means the gospel.
2. **Wholeheartedly** means that this truth convicts and affects the heart. Before the gospel hits the heart, it is possible to have a merely intellectual or volitional Christianity, in which Christian ethical principles are followed superficially. But the gospel grasped changes one's "bottom lines," it shows you that you are "offering

yourself" to power or acceptance etc. (i.e. sin) even if you are morally acceptable externally.

3. **Obeyed** means that, once the gospel-truth really penetrates the heart, it shows itself in real life change.
4. **Thanks be to God** means that this whole process was due to God's grace.

Sum: Slavery to sin begins at our birth. Slavery to God begins at our new birth when God's grace enables us to embrace the gospel in the heart (changing our motives, our "bottom lines") resulting in a total change of life!

b) Development v.19. Their development is *very similar*.

In verse 19 we see that each kind of slavery proceeds and advances. Neither one stands still.

A. v.19b – "You offered the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness." Slavery to sin results in deterioration — "ever increasing." And it comes because the internal imperatives of covenant lords of our lives (see above) are seeking to work their wills out in the world through our bodies. **As we act out of a particular purpose, that action shapes our character and will so that it becomes easier to act in that way again.** *Offering the parts >> to impurity >> ever increasing wickedness.*

"Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only seventy years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live for ever. Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse — so gradually that the increase in seventy years will not be very noticeable. But it might be absolute hell in a million years. In fact, if Christianity is true, Hell is the precisely correct technical term for what it would be."

– C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk 3, chap 3

B. v.19c – "Offer them [parts of your body] to righteousness leading to holiness." In the same way, as we act according to the truth, then our character and will is shaped into habits of holiness and righteousness.

c) Results vv.20-22. Their results are a *total contrast*.

A. v.21 – "What benefit did you reap... these things result in death!" How does sin bring death? Of course, ultimately, sin brings condemnation and separation from God for eternity. But Paul is talking of a "death" that these Christians used to experience. So he is referring to "brokenness of life." Here's how that works: If you don't obey the law of God, you become a slave to selfishness, lust, bitterness, pride, materialism, worry, drivenness, fear, etc. The particular enslaving sins depend on the particular "bottom line" besides God you have "offered yourself" to. For example, if you are enslaved to approval, you will constantly experience self-pity, envy, hurt feelings, inadequacy. If you are enslaved to success, you will experience drivenness, fatigue, worry and fear, and so on.

B. vv.22-23 – “The reward... is holiness... eternal life.” People who “offer themselves” to obedience grow in the fruit of the spirit, and anyone who is awash in love, joy, self-control, kindness, etc., experiences a liberty.

4. vv.18-19 How practically do we live out and maintain our freedom from sin?

As in 6:13, “parts of your body” (also translated “members”) is not strictly referring to our arms and legs per se, but rather *all our components that can carry out or act out on design or purpose*. Paul says that “impurity” is a motive or a purpose; to “offer the parts of our body” to it is simply to “act out.” Thus we see that slavery to God is the result of an active effort on our part to “act out” *what we know is true of us*. “Offering our members (or “parts of our body”) means we are to act in accordance with what the Bible tells us about reality.

1. The principle: We must remember that v.19 comes after v.18. In v.18 Paul says, “You *have been set free from sin*.” We spoke of this last week. Conversion brings us into a new realm and puts a new power into us. Therefore sin no longer can *force* us to do anything. So when v.19 says, “Now offer them in slavery to righteousness,” he is saying, *be what you are*, be controlled in your behavior, not by feelings or appearances, but by realities that the gospel tells you about.

Other examples of this kind of exhortation: “Work out your salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you...” (Phil.2:12-13). In other words, *knowing* that God is at work — work! Work *as if* this is true, because it is.

“The New Testament method way of sanctification, therefore, is to get us to realize our position and standing, and to act accordingly. That is the New Testament way of teaching... holiness. In other words, ‘be what you are’... How often we are told that we need something further... but there is no indication of that anywhere here. It is because of what has *already* happened, it is because of what is true of us, that this command is addressed to us [to offer ourselves slaves of righteousness, v.19].”

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones

2. The practice: How does this actually work itself out?

It means coming to daily situations and recognizing the possibility of treating God as my “highest good” and thus my master or of treating something else as my “highest” good and thus my master.

For example: If someone says something that makes me look bad, I “offer myself” as a slave to God or sin at that moment. I could let my desire for “face” and to look good be my master. I could let my heart say, “This is a disaster! I look like a fool! I have to discredit this person quickly! I must pay back!” At that point, if I act out of this kind of thinking (offering myself to it) I will respond with bitterness, harsh language, and so on. Or I could remember that pleasing Christ is my ruling motivation. I could have my heart say, “Well, this person has pointed out (albeit with a hateful motive) some flaw in me I really should deal with. But fortunately, God is my judge and he has accepted me in Jesus Christ.” At that point, if I act out of this kind of thinking, I will respond by

repenting in my heart toward God for what I truly am guilty of and responding with a soft answer (Prov.15:1) to the person who made the point.

“From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the center is opened to it. This sin is committed daily by young children and ignorant peasants as well as by sophisticated persons, by solitaries no less than by those who live in society: It is the fall in every individual life, and in each day of each individual life, the basic sin behind all particular sins: At this very moment you or I are either committing it, or about to commit it, or repenting it... We try, when we wake, to lay the new day at God’s feet; [but] before we have finished shaving, it becomes our day and God’s share in it is felt as a tribute which we must pay out of ‘our own’ pocket, a deduction from the time which ought, we feel to be ‘our own’...”

– C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, ch 5

5. 7:1-6 What does the marriage metaphor teach us about: a) Our relationship to the law? b) Our relationship to Christ? (Hint: How does the metaphor continue to answer the question of 6:15 – “Are Christians now free to live as they choose?”)

- a) **We are released from the law, because in Christ we legally “died”** (v4). In vv.1-3 Paul gives an illustration of a basic fact; the law only binds those who are alive! Death breaks the law’s power. Marriage is a binding legal relationship, but it is only binding if *both* husband and wife are alive. If either dies, both are freed from the law of marriage. Then in vv.4-6 Paul applies this to us. While it is the husband’s death that frees the wife to remarry; in our case it is *our* death (in Christ) that frees us to “remarry.” The analogy is not completely parallel, but the principle is the same.
- b) **Becoming a Christian is a complete change in relationship and allegiance.** What an incredible metaphor; we are married to Christ! To be a Christian is to fall in love with Jesus and to enter into a legal YET personal relationship as *comprehensive* as marriage. To marry is a comprehensive thing. No part of your life goes unchanged or unaffected. So though Christians are now not “under law,” they have every aspect and area of their lives changed by the coming in of Jesus Christ. No single area is untouched.
- c) **Being “married to Christ” is the final answer to the question, “Can a Christian live as he or she chooses?” No, because we are in love with Christ!**

Marriage does entail a significant loss of freedom and independence. You *cannot* live now simply as you choose. A single person can make decisions unilaterally but a married person cannot. There is not duty and obligation. BUT, on the other hand, there is now the possibility of an experience of love and intimacy and acceptance and security that you could not have as a single person. Because of this love and intimacy, our loss of freedom is a joy not a burden. In a good marriage, your whole life is affected and changed by the wishes and desires of the person you are in love

with. *You get pleasure from giving pleasure.* You seek to discover the wishes of the beloved and are happy to make changes in accord with those wishes. So now Paul has given us the ultimate answer to how Christians live. We are not “under law,” in that we don’t obey the law *out of fear of rejection*. In other words, we aren’t using the law as a system of salvation, a way of acceptance or access to God, a ladder up to him. No! Jesus’ perfect life and death is the ladder up to God, and we are accepted in him. So does the Christian ignore the moral law of God? Not at all. We now look at it as expressing the desires of God. He loves honesty, purity, generosity, truth, integrity, kindness, and so on. We now use the law to please the one who saved us. So we are not “under the law.” We are not married to *it*. We are married to *Christ*, we are seeking to please him, and so the law’s precepts are ways to honor the one we love. They are now not a burden.

Sum: Someone might say, “If I thought I was saved totally by grace and could not be rejected, I’d lose all incentive to lead a holy life.” The answer is: “Well then, all the incentive you have now is fear. You are under the law. If you understand that you are accepted, the new incentive is *grateful joy and love*. That is the right incentive.”

6. 7:6. In light of the marriage metaphor, what do you think it means to serve “in the new way of the Spirit” rather than in “the old way of the written code?”

This does NOT mean that the written law of God in the Holy Scriptures is not binding on us, but rather that we obey in a new motivation (love for our husband) and in a new framework (we are accepted on the basis of Christ’s fulfilling the law, not ours). John Stott puts it perfectly:

“Is the law still binding on the Christian? The answer to that is “No!” and ‘Yes!’ ‘No’ in the sense that our acceptance before God does not depend on it. Christ in his death fully met the demands of the law, so we are delivered from it [as a means of salvation]. It no longer has any claims on us [to condemn us for sin]. It is no longer our lord. ‘Yes’ in the sense... we still serve... But the motive and means of our service have altered. Why do we serve? Not because the law is our master and we have to, but because Christ is our husband and we want to. Not because obedience to the law leads to salvation, but because salvation leads to obedience to the law. The law says, ‘Do this and you will live’. The gospel says, ‘You live, so do this.’ How do we serve? Not in oldness of letter, but in the newness of spirit. That is, not by obedience to an external code, but by surrender to an indwelling Spirit.”

– John Stott, *Men Made New*

7. 7:4 says we have to be “dead to the law” to “bear fruit for God.” How does being “not under the law” help us develop a holy life?

The last question in study 10 dealt with this same issue. Chapter 6:14 shows us that to be “under sin” is the same as being “under law” (cf. 5:20-21 with 6:14). Verse 14 tells us that it is our freedom from the law as a salvation-system that makes us free from

the mastery of sin over us. (“Sin shall not have mastery over you, *for* you are not under law...”) Why? It is only as we break away from works-righteousness that the power of sin is really broken in our lives. We are righteous in God’s sight and if we remember this, the *motives* for our sin will be undermined. Individual sinful acts have sinful motivations. When we ask *why* we are moved to particular sins, we discover that our sins come because we still seek to find our “justification” (our identity, our sense of worthiness) in other things. Thus, to remember that we are completely loved and righteous in Christ undermines and saps our motives and desires for sin.

Romans

Warfare with sin

Study 12 | Romans 7:7-25

Summary

7:7-12 The vindication of the law.

- v.7a **Question:** Is the law a bad thing (since bondage to the law caused evil)?
- vv.7b-13 **Answer:** No, it was sin in me that makes the law ineffective.
- v.7b The law exposes sin for what it is.
- v.8 Sin is aroused by its exposure by law.
- v.9 The law convicts of sin.
- vv.10-11 Thus the law brings both aggravation of sin and overwhelming conviction of guilt
- v.12 **Sum:** the law is good, but I am sinful

7:13-25 Our continuing warfare with sin.

Introduction (v.13):

- v.13a **Question:** Is the law a killer?
- v.13b **Answer:** No, it is sin that is the killer.

Our experience of remaining sin (vv.14-25):

(vv.18-20 recapitulates vv.14-17)

- vv.14/18 **Our weakness:** We have remaining sinful nature, prone to evil.
- vv.15-16/19 **Our inner conflict:** Sin leads us to do things we hate.
- vv.17/20 **Our identity:** In a sense then, when we sin, it is the sin in us that does it, not our truest self.
- v.21 **Our dilemma:** The more we seek to do and be good, the more evil within presses upon us.
- vv.22-23 **The two forces** of the Christian heart:
– Love of God’s law in my truest self (“the law of my mind”)
– Sin that hates the law of God (“law in my members”)
- vv.24-25 **The two cries** of the Christian heart:
– Discouragement: “Who will deliver me?”
– Hope: “Christ will deliver me!”

1. vv.7, 8, 13 It is the purpose of the law to show us something. a) What is it? b) In what ways does it do this?

The main purpose of the law is to show us the character of sin. That is the only way to understand many of these statements: "I would not have known what sin is except through the law." (v.7) But how does it do this?

- a) First, it simply defines sin for us. "For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'" (v.7b). This means that the very concept of envy/coveting is outlined by the law and without that standard, Paul would not have understood that this is sin.
- b) Second, the law also reveals sin in us. "For apart from the law, sin lies dead." (v.8) This statement indicates that when the commandment of God comes to us, it actually aggravates and stirs sin up in our hearts, showing us not just what sin is in general, but how sin resides within us. Paul states this idea again in v.13 — "In order that sin might be recognized as sin... through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful." Paul is describing a situation in which he found that, the more he **tried** to avoid coveting/envy, the more the coveting and envy grew! In the end, sin in his life got utterly sinful, i.e. much worse. Then he could see his sinfulness and his need.

Paul's point: The law can not save us, but it can and must show us that we need to be saved! Unless the law does its work, we won't have any desire for Christ. We will be in denial about the depth and nature of our sin. In other words, we need the law to "convict" us of sin, before we can see our need for or have a desire for the grace of God in Christ. (More on this under question #3).

2. vv.8-9 How does the law actually aggravate or stir up the sin in our hearts (cf. v.5)? (Consult your own experience.)

Paul says (v.5) that the law "arouses" our sinful passions. Verses 8-9 says, "sin... produced in me... covetous desire... [for] when the commandment *came*, sin sprang to life."

How does it do this? The basic answer is that there is a "perversity" about our hearts. "Perversity" is a desire to do something for no other reason *than because it is forbidden*. It is a joy in wrongdoing for its own sake. Paul's point is that until the command against an evil thing comes to us, we may feel little urge to do it anyway. But when we hear the command, our native "perversity" is stirred up and may take over.

This insight is a door to understanding the very anatomy of sin, what it is in its essence. St. Augustine has the classic analysis of this point in his *Confessions*. He describes a time in which he stole some pears as a boy. He then extrapolates some profound insights from his experience.

"In a garden nearby to our vineyard there was a pear tree, loaded with fruit that was desirable neither in appearance nor in taste. Late one night... a group of very

bad youngsters set out to shake down and rob this tree. We took great loads of fruit from it, not for our own eating, but rather to throw it to the pigs... we did this to do what pleased us — for the reason *it was forbidden*... For I stole a thing of which I had plenty of my own and of much better quality. Nor did I wish to enjoy that thing which I desired to gain, but rather to enjoy the actual theft and the sin of theft...

[Speaking to God]: "In a perverse way, all men imitate you who put themselves far from you... What therefore, did I love in that theft of mine, in what manner did I perversely or viciously imitate my Lord?... Did it please me... to do with impunity things bearing a shadowy likeness of your omnipotence? Behold how your servant flees from his Lord and follows after a shadow!... Could a thing give pleasure... which was done for no other reason but because it was unlawful?"

– Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 2, ch 4(9); ch 6(14)

In this classic passage, Augustine argues that there is always a "depth motive" for every sin. When a person lies or steals or is impure or cruel, there is always a more superficial motive. There is greed or anger and so on. But Augustine's experience of the pear tree (and his study of Scripture!) showed him the underlying, ultimate motive of sin is *to play God*, to "imitate his omnipotence." We have a deep desire to be in charge of the world and of our lives. We want to be sovereign. Now *every* law God lays down is an infringement against our absolute sovereignty. It reminds us and prevents us from being sovereign to live as we wish. In its essence, sin is a force that *hates* any such infringement. It desires to be God. The first temptation came from the serpent. "You will be as God!" That was the original sin, and it is the original sin still within us.

Therefore, since the essence of sin is the desire to play God, to have no infringements on our sovereignty, then every law will stir sin up in its original force and power. The more we are exposed to the law of God, the more that sinful force will be aggravated into reaction.

3. vv.8-9 What do you think Paul meant when he said, "I was alive apart from the law?" What do you think he meant when he says "the commandment came, sin revived and I died?"

His "once" indicates that he is referring to a past experience. There has been a lot of discussion about the meaning of, "I was alive apart from the law." It is impossible that a Jewish boy from a devout family would have been "apart from the law" in the sense that he did not know it or try to obey it. There would have been no time in his unconverted life in which he would have been unrelated to the law. Almost certainly, "apart from the law" meant he had not ever seen the law's real and essential demands. He had not realized what the law really required. He saw a plethora of rules — but not the basic force or thrust of the law as a whole. He had no understanding of holiness, of what it meant to love God supremely, of what it meant to love his neighbor as himself. Thus he was "apart" from the law.

What does it mean though that he was “alive?” Paul probably is referring to his own self-perception. He felt he was spiritually alive — pleasing to God, satisfying to God. He is telling us that this perception of being “alive” was due to his ignorance of what the law really asks for. “But when the commandment came... I died.” That would mean that subsequently, something happened to show him that he wasn’t pleasing to God at all, but that he was under condemnation. In very graphic language, he says, “I realized I was DEAD!” So Paul is saying, in effect, “I thought I was doing quite well spiritually, I felt good or better than most — but then I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure and condemnation.”

What caused this change in consciousness? *The commandment came.* (v.9) It is obvious that God’s law had “come” into the world centuries ago. So Paul could not be talking about the commandment “coming” into the world in some way. Instead he meant that “the commandment came *home* to *me*.” Although Paul had a conscience, the demands of the moral law really hit him hard. In other words, he came under what is often called “conviction of sin.” Remember, it doesn’t mean Paul had never seen that he sinned, nor that Paul had never seen the commandment before. Rather, he finally realized that he was “dead,” that he was condemned, lost because of his complete failure and inability to keep the law of God.

“When the commandment ‘came’ it killed forever the proud Pharisee thanking God that he was not as other men and sure of his merits before God. It killed off the happy sinner, for it showed him the seriousness, not so much of sin in general as of his own sin. The ‘coming’ of the law in that sense always kills off our cheerful assumption of innocence. We see ourselves for what we really are, sinners, and we die... It marks the end of self-confidence, self-satisfaction, self-reliance. It is death.”

– Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*

In summary, to “die” in this sense means to see that you are a moral failure, that you are lost, and that you cannot save yourself.

4. vv.7-8 Which Biblical commandment seems to have “slain” Paul? Why would a Pharisee like Paul be so convicted by it?

All the Pharisees thought of sin only in terms of external actions. They felt that as long as you didn’t perform an evil act, you were not guilty of sin. This made it far easier to think of yourself as an obedient, law-abiding person.

Apparently, the commandment that “killed” Paul was the commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” We know that all of the 10 commandments refer not only to behavior, but to inward attitudes and motives. For example, Jesus said, “You heard it said, ‘Thou shalt not kill’, but that means we shouldn’t be bitter or hate our neighbor either!” However, when you read the 10 commandments as they are written (in Exodus 20) you could easily look at them only in terms of externals, in terms of overt behavior. So you could easily tick them off and feel that you are “alive” spiritually. You could say, “I haven’t worshipped an idol, haven’t disobeyed my parents, haven’t killed, lied, stolen,

committed adultery... I'm doing fine!" In other words, you can interpret the law superficially, seeing it only as behavioral rules that are not that hard to keep.

But the last commandment is the one that cannot be reduced to an external. "Thou shalt not covet" has completely to do with inward attitudes and heart issues. To "covet" is to be discontent with what God has given you. "Coveting" includes envy, self-pity, grumbling and murmuring. Coveting is not simply "wanting," it is an *idolatrous* longing for more beauty and wealth and approval and popularity than you have. It is not wrong to want and aim for such things, but if, when you don't achieve them, you are bitter and downcast, it is because your desiring of them had become idolatrous coveting. Now Paul had never understood sin as a matter of inward longings and idolatrous drives and desires. He had never seen sin as essentially "coveting" against God, *failing to love God enough to be content*. He had thought of sin only in terms of violations of rules.

"The real trouble with the unregenerate is that they do not know and understand the truth about sin. They have their moral code, they believe that certain things are right and certain things are wrong [and that they often sin by wrongdoing]... but that is not to understand sin. The moment you understand the true nature and character of sin you become troubled about your soul and seek a savior. So anyone who is not seeking a Savior does not understand the true nature of sin. It is the peculiar function of the law to bring such an understanding to your mind and conscience."

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

5. vv.14-25. Is Paul speaking of an unbeliever's or a believer's struggle with sin?

What is the evidence (in the text) for your answer?

This is a difficult question, and plenty of thoughtful people have been on both sides of this issue. Some believe that a believer could not talk like Paul does, when he says, "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave under sin." (v.14) He also virtually confesses that he sins regularly, even compulsively. "What I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do..." (v.15) "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (v.19) Therefore, over the ages, many people have concluded that Paul is talking of himself as he was before conversion. Here, however, we are going to make a case that Paul is talking of his own present experience. The evidence —

- A. There's a change in verb tenses. The verbs of vv.7-13 are in the past tense, but from v.14 on all the tenses are present. A natural reading would tell us Paul is speaking of his own "now."
- B. There's a change in situation. Verses 7-13 talk about sin "killing" him. He's dead. But from v.14 on Paul describes an ongoing struggle with sin in which he refuses to surrender.
- C. Paul delights in God's law. He says, "In my inner being I delight in God's law..." (v.22) and then goes on to say sin nonetheless is at work within him. Now

unbelievers cannot delight in God's law in their heart of hearts. In Romans 8:7, Paul says that "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." This categorically denies that any unbeliever can delight in God's law. Chapter 8:7 nearly proves that 7:22 can't be the words of an unbeliever.

D. Paul admits he is a lost sinner. He says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." (v.18) As we have seen in vv.7-13, unbelievers are not aware of being lost and so sinful that they can't save themselves. In fact, even immature believers tend to be over-confident and unaware of the depths of the depravity of their own hearts.

Sum: The speaker is Paul — a mature believer! (Nevertheless, those who hold the opposing opinion need to be treated with respect! Many smart, godly people have disagreed with the position given here.)

6. vv.14-25. What does Paul tell us here about: a) What has changed? b) What has not changed? c) What our need is? d) What our hope is? as Christians?

a) First, Paul tells us **we now identify with the law of God.** A Christian can now delight in the law (v.22) which wasn't possible before (cf. 8:7). A Christian can also see its beauty and perfection (vv.12, 14a, 16), and can long to keep it (v.18b). None of these things were possible before we were converted. But even beyond this, Paul says that it is in "my inner being" that he rejoices in the law. This is like saying "my heart of hearts" or "my true self." (Some translations render it "my inmost self.") Paul here is recognizing that we all are aware of conflicting desires. We have, in some sense, "multiple selves." Sometimes we want to be this. Sometimes, in contrast, we want to be that. Morally, most people feel "torn" between diverse selves as well. Freud went so far as to talk about an inner "libido" (filled with primal desires) and a "superego" (the conscience, filled with social and familial standards). The great question we all face: "*I have divergent desires, different 'selves.' Which is my true self? What do I most want?*"

Now for a Christian, that *question* is settled even though the *conflict* isn't settled. Paul calls the law of God his "inmost" delight, and even calls it "the law of my mind" (v.23) (Cf.v25b – "I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law.") Of course, Paul sees that there is still a powerful force of sin and rebellion within, but those desires are not truly "him." "It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." A Christian has had an identity transformation. As a Christian "**I,**" my truest self really seeks God and loves his law and holiness. While sin remains in me, with a lot of strength, it no longer controls the personality and life. It is still able to lead us to disobey God *but now, sinful behavior goes against our deepest self-understanding.* The Christian, even in defeat, has a change of consciousness, the "I" the REAL ME is the law of God. Sin is "it."

b) Second, Paul tells us that the Christian still has a powerful center of remaining sin within. It is a "sinful nature" (v.18). It is part of his nature or heart that "seeks what I hate" (v.15). This means that in himself he cannot fulfill the law. In vv.7-13 he is showing us that the unbeliever cannot keep the law (so we need the work of the Son); in vv.14-25 he is telling us even the *Christian* cannot keep the law (so we need the work

of the Spirit). Many people are puzzled that Paul seems to not only characterize his present condition as one of struggle, but almost of defeat — “I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (v.14). But the reason Paul tends to cast things in this way is because he is looking at his struggle from a particular perspective. Paul is probably emphasizing that *in yourself*, a Christian is incapable of keeping the law. Notice that he uses the word “I” numerous times. Thus he is saying, “In myself, I am still unable to live as I should.” Even though there is a new identification, love and delight in the law of God, a Christian is STILL completely incapable of keeping the law.

[Note: This may not be clear to readers unless they can see how Paul uses the word “law” in three distinct ways in these verses. (1) Sometimes “law” means the law of God (as in verses 14, 16, 22, and 25). (2) But in verse 21 Paul uses the word “law” once to denote a principle. “I find this law at work.” Paul means “I find it to be a principle—the more I try to do good, the more evil comes at me.” (3) Lastly, in verses 23 and 25 Paul uses the word “law” to mean a force or power. “But I see another law at work in my members... the law of sin.” Paul is saying:

“In my heart of hearts [“inner being” v.22; “my mind” v.23] I delight in God’s law. God’s law is now the main power in my heart and mind. But there is another power within me — the power of sin. It is not the ruling influence of my heart, but it is still within me and makes war against my deepest desires for holiness.”

c) and d) In this way Paul is setting the table to show us what he has to say in Romans 8 about life in the Spirit. He is telling us that without walking in the Spirit, we still cannot live the Christian life. This is not therefore a hopeless case. Paul will tell us the triumphant possibilities for Christian living in Romans 8, through the Spirit of God. And he foreshadows that triumph in v.25 when he says, “Thanks be to God — through our Lord Jesus Christ.” *God, through Christ, will deliver us from this “body of death.”* So even in this perspective of his weakness in himself, Paul has conviction of a triumph.

7. If this is the Apostle’s present experience, how does this both warn and comfort us?

First, it warns us that *no* one ever gets so advanced in the Christian life that they no longer see their sin. This is the apostle Paul talking! It warns us that if we ever perceive ourselves to be “over” sin, if we ever feel ourselves to be pretty good and mature Christians, we are deceived. **For the more mature and spiritually discerning we get, the more we see of the sin in our hearts.** So, the more holy we become, the less holy we will *feel*. This is not false modesty. Even when we know and see ourselves making progress against many bad habits and attitudes, we will grow more aware of the rebellious and selfish roots that are still within us. The holier we are, the more we cry “What a wretch I am! Who will deliver me from this sin within!”

Second, it warns us that no one gets so advanced that they don’t *struggle* with sin. It is quite important to expect a fight with our sinful nature. In fact, just as a wounded bear is more dangerous than a healthy and happy bear, our sinful natures might become *more* stirred up and active because the new birth has mortally wounded it.

“As a man nailed to the cross first struggles and strives and cries out with great strength and might [though] as his blood and life energies waste, his strivings become faint and seldom... So when a [Christian] first sets on a lust or sin to deal with it, it struggles with great violence to break loose; it cries with earnestness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved... It may have a dying pang that makes an appearance of great vigor and strength... but it is over, particularly if it is kept from considerable success...”

– John Owen, *On Mortification*

“True Christianity is a fight... Do we find in our heart a spiritual struggle? Do we feel anything of the flesh lusting against the spirit and spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things we would? (Gal.5:17) Are we conscious of two principles within us, contending for the mastery? Do we feel anything of war in our inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification. All true saints are soldiers. Anything is better than apathy, stagnation, deadness, and indifference. We are in a better state than many. The most part of so-called Christians have no feeling at all... I say again, let us take comfort. The children of God have two great marks — they may be known by their inward warfare as well as by their inward peace.”

– J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*

On the other hand, it comforts us. It is typical, when we struggle with sin, to think that we must be terrible persons, or very wicked or immature to have such wrestling. But Romans 7 encourages us that temptation and conflict with sin, even some relapses into sin, are consistent with being a growing Christian.

“The most renowned and now crowned saints have, in the days of their being on earth, relapsed into one and the same sin. Lot was twice overcome with wine; Abraham did often lie, and twice lay his wife open to adultery to save his own life, which even the heathens would not have done... David in his wrath was resolved to slay Nabal and his family, but repented, and yet after this he fell into the foul murder of Uriah... Samson is by the Spirit of the Lord numbered among the worthies (Heb.11:32) yet he fell often into one gross sin. Peter you know relapsed often, and so did Jonah; and this comes to pass that they may see their own inability to stand, to resist or overcome temptations (Jude 14-16), so that they may be taken off from all false confidences, and rest wholly upon God, and only upon God, and always upon God...”

[But remember] God always makes even his dearest ones dearly smart for their relapses, as may be seen by his dealings with Samson, Jehoshaphat, and Peter. Ah, Lord! what a hard heart hath that man who can see thee stripping thy dearest ones for their relapses, and yet make nothing of returning to folly.”

– Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*

Note: If your group participants tried the “tongue assignment” on the Participants notes, you could discuss people’s experiences with it here.

TEACHING D

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Identifying the Idols of the Heart

Introduction

In the book of Romans, Paul has been developing a profound “anatomy of sin.” He shows us that sin goes much deeper than mere behavioral violations. Sin begins at the motivational level, and thus, in Romans 8, he will show that sin cannot simply be resisted at the volitional level through mere will power, but must primarily be rooted out at the motivational level through the application of gospel-truth by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of “sonship” (Romans 8:12-16).

But in Romans 1-7, Paul first has shown us what sin really is and how sin operates deep under the surface of our lives. In this study we will “collect” his teaching on this topic and combine it with other material to bring out the fullness of the subject. So far Paul has said:

1. Our root problem is our unwillingness to glorify God, to give him the centrality which is his due. (Rom. 1:21 — For though they knew God, they neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him).
2. Therefore, we choose created things as “gods.” In order to deny God control of our lives, each of us chooses a created thing or things to live for and worship instead. (Rom.1:25 - worshipped... created things rather than the Creator.) We must worship something.
3. Therefore, each life is distorted by a life Lie. At the base of all our life choices, our emotional structure, our personality, is a false belief system centered on an idol — that something besides God can give us the life and joy that only God can give. (Rom.1:25 – They exchanged the truth of God for a lie; Rom.1:21 – But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.) We look to something besides Jesus to be our “saviour,” our “righteousness,” that which makes us good and acceptable.
4. And also, each life is a kind of bondage. No one is actually “free,” for whatever we give ourselves to live for, we must serve. (Rom.1:25 – worshipped and served created things.) Since every human being must have an ultimate “good” by which all other choices are made and values are judged, we all “offer ourselves” to something (Rom.6:16). Therefore every human being is in “covenant service” to a “lord” which works its will our through our bodies. (Rom. 6:16-19)
5. Even after conversion, our old false saviors/lords and their attendant false belief systems still distort our lives unless the power of the Holy Spirit continually renews our minds and hearts. (Romans 7:14-25)

6. The key to freedom is the application of the gospel of grace (Rom.6:14 – Sin will not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.)

PART I. UNDERSTANDING IDOLS

A. The primacy of idolatry

“The principle crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry. For although each individual sin retains its own proper feature, although it is destined to judgment under its own proper name also, yet they all fall under the general heading of idolatry... [All murder and adultery, for example are idolatry, for they arise because something is loved more than God — yet in turn, all idolatry is murder for it assaults God, and all idolatry is also adultery for it is unfaithfulness to God.] Thus it comes to pass, that in idolatry all crimes are detected, and in all crimes idolatry.”

– Tertullian, *On Idolatry* Chap. I

“The virtues on which the mind preens itself as giving control over the body and its urges, and which aim at any other purpose or possession than God, are in point of fact vices rather than virtues.”

– Augustine, *City of God* Chap. 19:25

“A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows that idolatry is nothing like the crude, simplistic picture that springs to mind of an idol sculpture in some distant country. As the main category to describe unbelief, the idea is highly sophisticated, drawing together the complexities of motivation in individual psychology, the social environment, and also the unseen world. Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds (Ezekiel 14). The apostle associates the dynamics of human greed, lust, craving, and coveting with idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). The Bible does not allow us to marginalize idolatry to the fringes of life... it is found on center stage.”

– Richard Keyes, *“The Idol Factory” in No God but God*

“The relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry. But let me focus the question through a particular verse in the New Testament... ‘Beloved, keep yourselves from idols’ (I John 5:21). How does that command merit being the final word in a 105 verse treatise on living in vital fellowship with Jesus, the Son of God?... [Keeping oneself from idols sums up what vital fellowship with Jesus is]...”

– David Powlison, *“Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”*

B. Defining idolatry

"[Each person] acts as if God could not make him happy without the addition of something else. Thus the glutton makes a god of his dainties; the ambitious man of his honor; the incontinent man of his lust; the covetous man his wealth; and consequently esteems them as his chiefest good, and the most noble end to which he directs his thoughts... All men worship some golden calf, set up by education, custom, natural inclination and the like... When a general is taken, the army runs. [Even so] this [the main 'idol'] is the great stream, and other sins but rivulets which bring supply... this is the strongest chain wherein the devil holds the man, the main fort... "

– Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*

"Sin predisposes us to want to be independent of God, to be laws unto ourselves or autonomous, so that we can do what we want without bowing to His authority. At the most basic level, idols are what we make out of the evidence for God within ourselves and in the world — if we do not want to face the face of God Himself in his majesty and holiness. Rather than look to the Creator and have to deal with his lordship, we orient our lives toward the creation, where we can be more free to control and shape our lives in our desired directions... since we were made to relate to God, but do not want to face Him [and let him control and shape us], thus we forever inflate things in the world to religious proportions to fill the vacuum left by God's exclusion... We do not just eliminate God, but we erect God-substitutes in his place."

– Richard Keyes, *"The Idol Factory" in No God but God*

1. Every self exists in relation to values perceived as making life worth living. A value is anything good in the created order — any idea, relation, object or person in which one has an interest, from which one derives significance.
2. These values compete... In time, one is prone to choose a center of value by which other values are judged... [which] comes to exercise power or preeminence over other values.
3. When a finite value has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen... a god... One has a god when a finite value is... viewed as that without which one cannot receive life joyfully. (To be worshipped as a god, something must be sufficiently good... Were my daughter not a source of exceptional affection and delight, she would not be a potential idolatry for me, but I am tempted to adore her in a way... disproportional.)

– Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia Chap. 6*

C. The Biblical theology of idolatry

“At the end of Exodus 20-23, the Lord says... ‘You shall make no covenant with them [pagan peoples] or with their gods.’ (v.32). [Paul says] unbelievers ‘worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (Rom.1:25). Man cannot escape his covenantal nature... worship and service are inseparable... [We must worship something — so we must serve something.] No more explicit statement of man’s allegiance to his idols could be made... Paul describes the unbeliever as one in slavery to sin (Rom. 6:16)... false service [or slavery] is thought of as emerging from a covenant with false gods.

The warning against making a covenant with a false god presumes a comparison with the true covenant... in the Sinaitic covenant of Exodus 20 there is A) The command to love. Exodus 20:3 demands: “you shall have no other gods before me...” B) The sanctions: Exodus 20 promises blessings or curses depending on our response to the covenant...

Now unbelief is an expression of a covenant with idols... All sin involves idolatry in one way or another, although it may not be immediately obvious. Sin does not occur in a vacuum. Despite our inability to fathom the depth of sin, we can describe it more accurately once we recognize our covenantal nature. One’s life as an unbeliever is organized around idolatry... Any theory of [human nature] which discusses the ‘why’ aspect of behavior wrestles with the question of motivation. What is a person really after? Why is he really after it? A covenant servant expects blessings and avoids curses [by serving his god.] Without rooting our view of human nature in the covenant, we will not be able to adequately describe human motivation. We will only see a collection of desires rather than an expression of a comprehensive covenant.”

– Michael W. Bobick, *From Slavery to Sonship: A Biblical Psychology For Pastoral Counseling*

“Idols of the heart are graphically portrayed in Ezekiel 14:1-8... If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘lust’ [inordinate desires], *epithumiai*, is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift. (See summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff, where *epithumiai* is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.) The tenth commandment [against ‘coveting’, which is idolatrous, inordinate desire for something]... also... makes sin ‘psychodynamic’. It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7... the NT merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires... for lust, demandingness, craving and yearning are specifically termed ‘idolatry’ (Eph.5:5 and Colossians 3:5).”

– David Powlison, *“Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”*

D. Discerning Idolatry

"An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. All sorts of things are potential idols... An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero. If this is so, how do we determine when something is an idol?"

- 1) As soon as our loyalty to anything leads us to disobey God, we are in danger of making it an idol...
 - Work, a commandment of God can become an idol if it is pursued so exclusively that responsibilities to one's family are ignored.
 - Family, an institution of God himself, can become an idol if one is so preoccupied with the family that no one outside one's own family is cared for.
 - Being well-liked, a perfect legitimate hope, becomes an idol if the attachment to it means one never risks disapproval.
- 2) [Idols] are inflated... suggesting that the idol will fulfill the promises for the good life... Idols tend to come in pairs — [for example] a nearby idol may be a rising standard of living, but the faraway idol is a semi-conscious belief that material success will wipe away every tear.
 - Richard Keyes, *"The Idol Factory" in No God but God*

"That most basic question which God poses to each human heart: "Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?"

Questions... bring some of people's idol systems to the surface. 'To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance?... What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?' These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors.

[This bears] on the immediate motivation of my behavior, thoughts, feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question: Who or what "rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?"

– David Powlison, *"Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"*

E. The effects of idolatry

1. General effects

"The idol begins as a means of power, enabling us to control, but then overpowers, controlling us."

– Richard Keyes, *"The Idol Factory" in No God but God*

2. Cognitive effects: "the delusional field"

"[Your] idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God's definitions. [They spin out a whole false belief system.] They establish a locus of control that is earth-bound: either in objects (e.g. lust for money), other people (e.g. 'I need to please my father'), or myself (e.g. attainment of my personal goals). Such false gods create false laws, false definitions of success and failure, of value and stigma. Idols promise blessings and warn of curses for those who succeed or fail [their standards]. 'If I [make enough money], I will be secure. If I can get these certain people to like and respect me, then my life will be valid...'

– David Powlison, *"Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"*

3. Emotional and behavioral effects: "bondage"

Anxiety [Idolatry and the future]

[5.] Anxiety becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths.

Guilt/Bitterness [Idolatry and the past]

[6.] Guilt becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose I value my ability to teach and communicate clearly... If clear communication has become an absolute value for me, a center of value that makes all my other values valuable... then if I [fail in teaching well] I am stricken with neurotic guilt.

[7.] Bitterness becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and something that is my ultimate value.]

Boredom/Emptiness [Idolatry and the present]

[8.] To be bored is to feel empty, [meaningless.] Boredom is an anticipatory form of being dead. To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries... [when any of those values are lost], boredom becomes pathological and compulsive... My subjectively experienced boredom may then become infinitely projected toward the whole cosmos... This picture of the self is called despair [The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism.]"

– Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia Chap. 6*

"The things frequently labeled 'co-dependency' are more precisely instances of 'co-idolatry.' People's typical idol patterns often reinforce each other and fit in an uncanny way into a [single, large] idol system, creating massively destructive feedback loops. The classic alcoholic husband and rescuing wife are enslaved within an idol system whose components complement each other all too well:

[1.] The idol pattern in the husband... might be a use of alcohol [a] to serve an idol of escape from the pains and frustrations in life, or [b] to serve an idol of self-crucifixion to deal with his periodic guilt and remorse... [2.] The idol pattern in the wife... might be a use of rescuing behavior [a] to serve an idol of personal worth by being a martyred savior of her family, or [b] to serve an idol of security by having a male's love and dependence on her.

Each of their idols (and the consequent behavior, thoughts, and emotions) is 'logical' within the idol system... Idols counterfeit aspects of God's identity and character... judge, savior, source of blessing, sin-bearer, object of trust... Each idol in the system 'makes promises' and 'gives warnings'. Service to each idol results in a hangover of misery and accusedness, because idols lie and murder. They are continually insinuated by the one who is a liar and murderer from the beginning."

– David Powlison, *"Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"*

F. Healing idolatry with the gospel

"Before you can [know you are at peace with God], you must not only be troubled for the sins of your life, but also for the sins of your best duties and performances... Before you can be at peace with God, there must be a deep conviction before you can be brought out of your self-righteousness; it is the last idol taken out of our heart. The pride of our heart will not let us submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But if you never felt that you had no righteousness of your own, if you never felt the deficiency of your own righteousness, you cannot come to Jesus Christ."

– George Whitefield, *"The Method of Grace"*

"If we accurately comprehend the interweaving of... behavior, deceptive inner motives, and powerful external forces, then... what was once 'dry doctrine' becomes filled with appeal, hope, delight and life. People see that the Gospel is far richer than a ticket to heaven and rote forgiveness for oft-repeated behavioral sins.

We... frequently do not get the Gospel straight and applicable. I will consider two [mistaken] tendencies — psychologizing and spiritualizing...

[1. A Psychologizing approach says, 'You feel horribly and act badly because your needs aren't being met — because your family did not meet them.' Then it says, 'God accepts you just as you are.' This is not the Biblical gospel, however... The Gospel is better than unconditional love. It says, 'God accepts you just as Christ is.' God has contraconditional love for you. Christ is fully pleasing to the Father and gives you his own perfect goodness.' God never accepts me as-I-am; he accepts me as-I-am-in-Christ. The center of gravity is different. The true Gospel does not allow God's love to be sucked into the vortex of my soul's [idolatrous systems. This approach just soothes the unhappy soul without getting to the source of the pain].

[2. In a Moralizing approach] Christ's forgiveness is applied simply to behavioral sins. The solution is typically construed in all-or-nothing terms: 'Let go and let God,' or 'repent

for these behaviors' ['total yieldedness'] or attempt to deal with the motive problems with a single act of housecleaning. There is little sense of patient process of inner renewal... daily dying to the false gods we fabricate.

– David Powlison, *“Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”*

“The faith that... is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness... It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others... But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have... is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us.

Moralism, whether it takes the form of either denunciation or “pep talks,” can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power... We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christians life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace.

Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons — much less secure than non-Christians, because they have too much light to rest easily under the constant bulletins they receive from their Christian environment about the righteousness they are supposed to have. Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce defensive assertion of their own [idolatrous achievements and righteousness] and defensive criticism of others. They come naturally to hate other cultural styles and other races, [idolizing their own culture, in order] to bolster their own security and discharge their suppressed anger. They cling desperately to legal, pharasaical righteousness, but envy, jealousy and other branches on the tree of sin grow out of this fundamental insecurity [the rejection of the righteousness of Christ.]”

– Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*

“Co-dependency literature often perceptively describes the patterns of dysfunctional idols which curse and enslave people (e.g. the rescuer or compulsive drinker). But the solution [in this same literature] is to offer different and presumably more workable idols, rather than the Bible’s Christ... Self-esteem... acceptance and love from new significant others, [better jobs and careers] create successful versions of the idols ‘fear of man’ and ‘trust of man.’ Eufunctional idols do ‘work’ and ‘bless’ with temporarily happy lives (Psalm 73)... but the idol system is intact...”

– David Powlison, *“Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”*

Summary

(This is based on Genesis 3 and on the readings and quotes based above. Compare this with the summary of what Paul says in Romans, outlined in the introduction.)

Step #1 – Pride. Sin is to seek to be God–self-existent and sovereign over himself! Sin is a desire to create a secure, independent life apart from God. An unwillingness to trust God, to admit we are creatures dependent on him.

Text: Genesis 3:5 – you will be like God.

Step #2 – Fear. Sin-pride leads to a pervasive awareness of our weakness and guilt. Thus there’s a drive to get both control and worth, while hiding from God, self, others.

Text: Genesis 3:10 – “I was afraid... so I hid”

Step #3 – The Lie. Sin-anxiety moves us to construct an idol-based belief system by which we seek both power and worth as independent from God. We trust the idols for them. The idol system distorts the way we perceive ourselves, success and failure, God, the world, and others.

Text: Genesis 3:12 – “you will not die... for God knows when you eat it your eyes will be opened.”

Step #4 – Self-justification. The Life-lie leads to a life of pleasing the idol(s): choices and behavior coherently designed to seek its blessings and avoid its curses. All idol systems are essentially a form of “works-righteousness” with its own set of standards and laws.

Text: Genesis 3:7 – “they... made coverings for themselves.”

Step #5 – Lusts. Because we give idols power to justify us, we must have them, creating deep inordinate drives and desires that master us and can’t be controlled. Our idols control us by capturing our imagination in the form of vivid, positive pictures of certain conditions we believe will make us happy and fulfilled.

Text: Genesis 3:16 – “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Step #6 – Varied miseries. Depending on how our circumstances are and how our self-justifying efforts go, our pain will differ. If someone or something blocks us from getting what we want, there is anger and scapegoating. If some condition threatens our idols there is deep fear and anxiety. If we fail our idol significantly, there is despair and self-hatred or guilt. If we please our idol fairly successfully, there is still emptiness and boredom.

PART II. IDENTIFYING YOUR IDOLS**A. Examine examples of idol-based “life-lies”:**

Power idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have power and influence over others.

Approval idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am loved and respected by _____

Comfort idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.”

Image idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have a particular kind of look or body image.

Control idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____.”

Helping idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — people are dependent on me and need me.”

Dependence idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.”

Independence idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.”

Work idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am highly productive getting a lot done.”

Achievement idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling in my career.”

Materialism idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.

Religion idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in it’s activities.”

Individual person idolatry: “Life only has meaning/ I only have worth if — this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me.”

Irreligion idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality.

Racial/cultural idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.”

Inner ring idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.”

Family idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — my children and/OR my parents are happy and happy with me.”

Relationship idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — Mr. or Ms. ‘Right’ is in love with me.”

Suffering idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — I am hurting, in a problem — only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt.”

Ideology idolatry: “Life only has meaning /I only have worth if — my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power.

B. Examine yourself when you are experiencing negative emotions. Find the possible idolatrous sources. For example:

- 1. If you are angry. Ask, "is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry — because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:**

- 2. If you are fearful or badly worried. Ask, "is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared — because something is being threatened which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:**

- 3. If you are despondent or hating yourself: Ask, "is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so 'down' — because I have lost or failed at something which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:**

C. Use diagnostic questions:

- 1. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?**

- 2. What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?**

- 3. What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go bad or get difficult?**

happy or meaningful. If I can't have it, I will despair. You are not enough. I need this too as a requirement for being fulfilled. In fact, if you would take it from me, I'd turn my back on you, for you are negotiable but this is not! This is the real goal of my life — if you are not useful to me in achieving it, I might turn on you."

It is important to see what you are really saying, and recognize both the unreasonableness of it, AND the cruelty of it. We need to see how ungrateful we are being to Jesus. And we need to see how, at bottom, this is another way of avoiding Jesus as Savior, and trying to be our own.

B. Repent of this "sin beneath all the sins"

You must do it in two stages:

- a. Hating the sin for itself. "Lord, I see how repulsive this idol is for what it is — an idol. Lord, the thing itself is not what is evil — it is what my heart has done to it — elevating it — that makes it evil. I refuse to be controlled by it any longer. It wreaks havoc in my life. You justify me, not this. You are my master, not this. I will not be controlled by this. This is not my life (I don't have to have it), but CHRIST is my life (I only have to have him.)
- b. Rejoicing in the grace and work of Jesus. "Lord, I have been trying to earn my own salvation and weave my own righteousness. But you are my salvation and righteousness. I am accepted in your Son! All my problems come because I am forgetting how loved, honored, beautiful, secure, rich, respected, embraced, free in Jesus I am. And all other ways of finding honor, etc. are vain. Let me be so ravished with your love of me that no other love can control me."

Meditate on this poem by John Donne. Make it a prayer —

Take me to you, imprison me.
For I, except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except YOU ravish me.

APPENDIX**Dismantling Your Idols**

1. The “Moralizing” approach says: Your problem is that you are sinning here and here. Repent!

(This focuses on behavior — but doesn’t go deep enough. We must find out the why of behavior — what inordinate desires are working and the idols and false beliefs behind them. To simply tell an unhappy person to ‘repent and change behavior’ won’t help because the lack of self-control is coming from a belief that says, ‘even if you live up to moral standards, if you don’t have this you are still a failure.’ You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.)

2. “Psychologizing” approach says: Your problem is that you don’t see that God loves you as you are.

This focuses on feelings — but doesn’t go deep enough. We must find out the reason a person doesn’t feel happy or loved — what inordinate desires are working and the idols and false beliefs behind them. To simply tell an unhappy person ‘God loves you’ won’t help, because the unhappiness is coming from a belief that says, ‘even if God loves you, but you don’t have this you are still a failure.’ You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

3. “Gospel application” approach says: Your problem is that you are looking to something besides Christ to be your happiness.

This confronts a person with the real sin under the sins and behind the bad feelings. Repentance for rejecting Christ’s free grace and acceptance is a sorrowful YET joyful act. Paul tells us that the bondage of sin is broken when we come out from under the law. Every idol is the center of some system of works-righteousness by which we are seeking to “earn” our salvation by pleasing the idol. Every idol-system is a way to be “under the law.” Only when we realize we are righteous in Christ is the idol’s power over us broken. Sin shall not be your master for you are not under law, but under grace. (Rom.6:14) To live and think of yourself as “under grace” means that no created thing can now master or control you. You can enjoy them.

Romans

Fighting sin with the Spirit

Study 13 | Romans 8:1-13

Summary

8:1-4 Salvation — total victory over sin

- v.1 1st aspect: no condemnation for sin.
- v.2 2nd aspect: no bondage to sin.
- v.3 1st aspect comes through Christ's work.
- v.4 - 2nd aspect comes through Spirit's work.
(Transition: how does the Spirit defeat sin in us now?)

8:5-13 Overcoming sin with the Spirit

Setting the mind on the Spirit

- v.5 Whatever preoccupies the mind controls the life,
- v.6 leading to either death or peace.

The inability of our minds to deal with sin

- v.7 Our minds are naturally hostile to God and so
- v.8 make us incapable of a life pleasing to God.

The ability of the Spirit to deal with sin

- v.9 Without the Spirit you are not a Christian.
- v.10 If we have the Spirit, we have spiritual life now
- v.11 and new, immortal bodies later.

Killing sin with the Spirit

- v.12 Our motive: we are in debt!
- v.13a Our power: by the Spirit.
- v.13b Our aim: the killing of our sinful nature.
- v.13c Our reward: spiritual life.

Introductory remarks

In Romans 7, Paul showed us that on the one hand, Christians still wrestle with remaining, indwelling sin. He says... "but what I hate I *do*" (Rom.7:15). But on the other hand, Christians have experienced a revolution in consciousness — a real disgust over sin and now an inability to find any lasting pleasure in it. "But what I *hate* I do." These two facts keep us from either the legalism which says, "real Christians don't struggle with sin any more" or the permissiveness which says, "real Christians are human, they will sin just like anyone else." The Spirit of God has come in and transformed our "inmost heart" and self (7:22) so we want God and holiness, but our "flesh" or sin nature is still powerful enough to keep us from doing what our new desires want.

But Romans 7 does not say everything about the Christian life. Our new condition — a “double nature” — can actually lead to *more* distress unless we “live according to the Spirit” (8:4). Paul gives us directions on how to live in the Spirit. Unless we do, we will find ourselves continually doing what we *hate*.

1. v.1 What does the phrase ‘no condemnation’ mean? Paraphrase it several ways. Does ‘no condemnation’ refer only to our past, or also to our present and future?

These two words tell us of our position as Christians. To be “not condemned” is of course a legal term — it means to be free from any liability or penalty. No one has any charges against you. Now a person *who is in Christ Jesus* is not under any condemnation from God. Paul has already said this in Romans 5:16 and 18. This is tremendous. It means God has nothing against us! He finds no fault in us. He finds nothing to punish us for.

However, the phrase Paul uses is not simply that Christians are “not condemned.” This is a much stronger phrase than that. He says that for Christians there is no condemnation at all. It doesn’t exist for us. It’s not that we have moved out from under it for a while, but that it could return. No, there’s no condemnation for us at all — it doesn’t exist anymore.

The reason it is important to mention this is that many think that a Christian is only temporarily out from under condemnation. Many want to limit the meaning of this phrase to only our past, or our past and present. But Paul is saying categorically that for a believer condemnation no longer exists at all. It is not waiting in the wings to come back over us to cloud our future!

Many believe that Christians who confess sin and then live a good life are forgiven and are at that moment not condemned. But they believe that, should they sin, they are back under condemnation until they confess and repent again. In other words, if a Christian man were to backslide and sin, he comes again under condemnation and could be lost if he died in that state. In other words, Christians are people who can be moving back and forth in and out of condemnation.

But this view doesn’t square at all with the comprehensiveness and intensity of Paul’s statement. Paul says quite literally *that condemnation itself no longer exists for us* — “there is no condemnation for those.” This situation only happens “now... in Christ Jesus.” Thus, the moment we come into Christ Jesus, condemnation is gone forever. In other words:

There is no *more* condemnation left for us — it is gone!

There can *never more* be condemnation for us!

There is *nothing* but acceptance and welcome for us!

2. v.1 One wrote: “most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of this verse [that there is ‘no condemnation’].” What troubles does this cause?

“Because this is true of him, the Christian should never feel condemnation; he should never allow himself to feel it... if we are Christians, your sins and mine — past sins, present sins, and future sins — have already been dealt with once and forever! Had you realized that? *Most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of this verse...*

We can put it in the form of an illustration. The difference between an unbeliever sinning and a Christian sinning is the difference between a man transgressing the laws of... any State, and a husband who has done something he should not do in his relationship with his wife. He is not breaking the law, he is wounding the heart of his wife. That is the difference. It is not a legal matter, it is a matter of personal relationship and... love. The man does not cease to be the husband [legally in that instance]. Law does not come into the matter at all... In a sense it is now something much worse than a legal condemnation. I would rather offend against a law of the land objectively outside me, than hurt someone whom I love... You have sinned, of course, but you have sinned against love... You may and you should feel ashamed, but you should not feel condemnation, because to do so is to put yourself back ‘under the law’...”

– D. M. Lloyd-Jones

This powerful illustration shows what happens if we forget that there is “no condemnation.”

- A. On the one hand, we feel far more guilt and unworthiness and pain than we should. From this may come: drivenness from a need to “prove ourselves;” great sensitivity to criticism, defensiveness; a lack of confidence in relationships; a lack of confidence and joy in prayer and worship; and even addictive behavior, which can be a reaction to a deep sense of guilt and unworthiness.
- B. On the other hand, we will have far less motivation to live a holy life. We have fewer resources for self-control. As the illustration by Lloyd-Jones shows, Christians who don’t understand ‘no condemnation’ only obey out of fear and duty. That is not nearly as powerful a motivation as love and gratitude.

3. vv.1-2. What two great benefits have been given to us who are in Christ Jesus? (vv.3-4) How did we get each of the two benefits come to us? What is the final purpose of both of them (v.4)?

Preliminary: We’ve said before that Paul can use the word “law” to mean a) a force or principle, or b) God’s law or standards. The word “law” is used in each instance in verses 2-4.

- v.4 "Law" is clearly the law of God.
- v.3 "Law" is clearly the law of God.
- v.2b "The law of the Spirit of life" seems pretty clearly to mean the Holy Spirit.
- v.2a "The law of sin and death" is the indwelling power of sin still in our nature. (cf.7:23)

Benefits. The first benefit is our justification — the fact that God has dealt with our sins so there is no more condemnation for us (v.1). The second benefit is our "sanctification" — the fact that the Holy Spirit (the law of the Spirit of life) has come into us to free us from bondage to the sin within our hearts (the law of sin and death-v.2). In other words, we are delivered 1) from the legal condemnation of sin, and we are being delivered 2) from the *actual* power of sin. Put another way, salvation deals with both our legal guilt and our internal corruption. No shame, and no bondage!

Note: Some people wonder about the relationship of v.1 to v.2. Paul says: "There is no condemnation for Christians *because* the Holy Spirit frees us from sin." This could be read to mean that our sanctification by the Holy Spirit is the cause or ground of our justification. But all of Romans up to this point denies that. Instead, Paul is likely saying that "we *know* that we are out of condemnation, because God has sent the Holy Spirit into our life to free us from sin."

How they come. In vv.3-4 Paul shows us how God has affected the two sides of salvation (no guilt, no bondage). First, God sent his Son to become human (in the likeness of sinful man) and become *a sin offering*. In other words, the death of Christ defeats sin legally by paying the debt. Second, God did this not simply to defeat sin legally, but to wipe it out *actually* in our lives — "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us... who live according to the Spirit." In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit within us empowers us to obey the law. Thus salvation comes by 1) the work of Christ *for* us, and 2) the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us.

The purpose of it all. V.4 tells us that everything Christ did for us — his incarnation (sending his Son in the likeness...), his death and his resurrection was *all in order that* (for the purpose) of our living a holy life! This is an amazing point. The thing Jesus lives for, the purpose of his entire life, is to bring us to be holy, to fulfill "the righteous requirement of the law." This is the greatest possible motive for living a holy life. Whenever we sin, we endeavor to frustrate the aim and purpose of the entire life and death and ministry of Jesus Christ! *If this doesn't work as incentive for a holy life — nothing will.*

Guiding question: In v.4, we are told that the Spirit leads us to fulfill the "just requirement" of the law. How does this square with the concept that we are no longer under the law?

“We are set free from the law as a way of acceptance, but obliged to keep it as a way of holiness. It is as a ground of justification that the law no longer binds us... But as a standard of conduct the law is still binding, and we seek to fulfill it as we walk in the Spirit.”

– John R.W. Stott

4. vv.5-6. What does Paul say here is the connection between “minding” and “living?” What do you think it means to ‘set the mind’ on the Spirit in light of the rest of Romans 8?

a) Paul says the connection between living and thinking is a tight and close one. Literally he says: “For those being according to the flesh *mind* the things of the flesh, but those being according to the spirit *mind* the things of the Spirit.” In other words, whatever you have set your mind upon shapes your lifestyle and character. But what does it mean to “mind” something or “set the mind?” Even in English, when the word “mind” is used as a verb, it has a stronger meaning than simply “to think about.” It means to focus intently on something, to be preoccupied with something, to have the attention and the imagination totally captured by something.

Archbishop William Temple once said, “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.” In other words, wherever you mind goes most naturally and freely (when there is nothing else to distract it), *that* is what you really live *for*. That is your religion. Your life is shaped by that which preoccupies your mind.

b) What are the “things of the Spirit?” This is not the same thing as simply thinking about religion all the time, or theology in general. The “things” of the Spirit would be those things to which the Spirit draws attention; to mind the Spirit would be to be preoccupied by the things the Spirit is preoccupied with. What are those? In the rest of chapter 8, we see that the Spirit comes to show us that we are sons and daughters of the Lord. (We will explore this much more next week.) Notice in v.14 that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. Verses 15-16 tell us that the Spirit removes a sense of fear of rejection and assures us we are God’s beloved children. Verses 26-27 tell us the Spirit gives us confidence to approach God in prayer. In other words, the rest of Romans 8 tells us what the Spirit is preoccupied with — how in Christ we are adopted, loved, welcomed.

A parallel passage is Colossians 3:1-4. “Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated... your life is now hid with Christ in God...” Here Paul tells us to be preoccupied with “things above” — we are to remember we have been raised with Christ and are accepted in him before the Father. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, but the principle is the same. **We are to be preoccupied with our standing in Christ. We are to drill into our minds and hearts his love and adoption of us.** To “mind the things of the Spirit” means to never forget our privileged standing, to never forget we are loved.

5. v.6 Write down some very practical ways in which ‘minding the Spirit’ leads to peace, but to forget the things of the Spirit leads to death?

Actually, we can take any negative emotions at all and see how this works out. Let’s say I am becoming extremely worried about something. Concern is unavoidable unless you are a totally uncaring and indifferent person. If you care about causes or people or your goals, then you will worry or have concerns. But if the worry becomes debilitating — it is always because I am forgetting that I am a child of God, that my heavenly Father would only be exercising his control over the universe in a way that would be loving to his own. Over-worry is forgetting the “things of the Spirit.”

Another example is when guilt and a sense of unworthiness drives us. A sign of this is when we take on too many things, when we assume crushing numbers of responsibilities. It is usually because we feel guilty or unworthy and are trying to “work off” our sin. In this case, we are also forgetting the “things of the Spirit.” I John 3:20: “Beloved, when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.” If we remember we are adopted children, we “go over the head” of our hearts when we feel unworthy.

There are numerous other examples! Take a recent incident where you were very upset or confused or distressed and think how what you were “minding” played a role.

6. v.13 The “misdeeds of the body” is the same as the “sinful nature.” How can it be “put to death by the Spirit?” Try to answer this question from the text.

We should notice the progression of thought here. In vv.9-11, Paul is saying that when we received Christ and became righteous in God’s sight, the Holy Spirit came in and made us spiritually alive. (v.10 – “Your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”) Someday, even our bodies will be totally renewed and eternally alive by the Spirit. (v.11– “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit.”) But there is still within us, which is hostile and inimical to our growing spiritual life, the remaining sin nature. And Paul says here that, “If you let the remaining sinful nature alone — if you allow it to prosper and grow, there will be terrible trouble. Instead, you must *by the Spirit* attack and put it to death.” The more you put to death the sinful nature, the more you will enjoy the spiritual life that the Holy Spirit gives — life and peace (v.6). This process of “putting to death” is what the older theologians used to call “mortification.” They got it from the old King James translation of the verse — “If ye through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

How do we do this and how do we learn what this is from the text?

1. First, it means ruthless full-hearted resistance to sinful practice. The very word translated “put to death” (Greek word *thanatoute*) is violent and total. It means a “ruthless rejection of all practices we know to be wrong” (John Stott). It means to declare war on attitudes and behaviors that are wrong — to give them no quarter, take no prisoners, to pull out all the stops. It means a Christian doesn’t play games with sin. You don’t “taper off” or say, “I can keep it under control.” You get as far away from it as possible. You don’t just avoid things you know are sin, but things that lead to it, and even things that are doubtful. This is war! Putting to death!

2. Second, it means the changing of one's motivation to sin by remembering to apply the gospel. This process of "mortification" goes deeper than merely resisting sinful behavior. It looks at the motives of the heart. Verse 12 says, "Therefore, brethren, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature..." This is a critical statement. "Therefore" refers to the statement before, in which Paul tells us we have been redeemed by Christ's righteousness and we will some day be totally delivered from all evil and pain in the bodily resurrection. Then Paul turns and says, "Therefore we have an obligation..." Some translations say, "Therefore we are debtors — but NOT to the sinful nature." **Paul means if we remember what Christ has done and will do for us, we will feel the obligations of love and gratitude to serve and know him.**

Paul is saying that sin can only be cut off at the root if we expose ourselves constantly to the unimaginable love of Christ for us. That exposure stimulates a wave of gratitude and a feeling of indebtedness. Sin only can grow in the soil of self-pity and a feeling of "owed-ness." "I'm not getting a fair shake! I'm not getting my needs met! I've had a hard life! God owes me; people owe me; I owe me!" That's the heart-attitude of "owedness." But Paul says, you must remind yourself that you are a debtor. You bathe yourself in the remembrance of the grace of God — that will loosen, weaken, and kill sin at the motivational level.

Therefore, "putting to death" (v.13) is just one form, a sub-set under "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit" (vv.5-6). Mortification is withering a sin's power over you by focusing on Christ's redemption in such a way as to soften your heart with gratitude and love which brings you to hate the sin for itself, so it loses its power of attraction over you.

Sum: We "kill sin in the Spirit" when we 1) turn from sinful practices ruthlessly, and 2) soften our heart from sinful motivations with a sense of our debt to love and grace by 3) minding the things of the Spirit.

7. Write down some very practical ways in which you can "put to death" a particular sin pattern. What will you say to your heart that can undercut sin's power over you?

The key to this exercise is to write down "grace-centered mini-sermons" you can preach to yourself during the day, especially when tempted. (Remember from v.5 — your life is an expression of your mind.) Most Christians try to control themselves with "law-centered mini-sermons." In other words, we say to ourselves things like: "God will get me" OR "It's against my Christian principles" OR "It will hurt people around me" OR "I will be embarrassed" OR "It will hurt my self-esteem" OR "I'll be caught" OR "I'll hate myself in the morning." Some or all of these may be true, but Paul tells us — inadequate! They don't kill. That is taking your sin to the law and using the sense of fear to deter yourself.

But we are to use the logic of the gospel on ourselves. "Look what he's done for me! Is this how I respond to him?"

“A legalistic conviction of sin ariseth from a consideration of God’s justice chiefly, but an evangelical conviction of sin comes from a sense of God’s goodness and grace. A legally convicted person cries out, ‘I have exasperated a power that is as the roaring of a lion... I have provoked one that is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, whose word can tear up the foundation of the world...’ But an evangelically convicted person cries, ‘I have incensed a goodness that is like the dropping of the dew; I have offended a God who comes to me as a loving friend!... Is my heart made of marble or iron to be so hard?’”

– Stephen Charnock, *Works*, vol.4, p.199

Here is how one old pastor preached to his heart with the gospel:

“What have I done? What love, mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled upon? Is this the return I make to the Father for his love, to the Son for his blood, to the Spirit for his grace? Do I thus requite the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash?... What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus?... Do I account communion with him of so little value?... Shall I endeavor to disappoint the very purpose of the death of Christ?”

– John Owen, *On Mortification*

Romans

Living as children of God

Study 14 | Romans 8:14-27

Summary

8:14 The requirement for being a child of God

Not everyone is a child of God, but only those who have the Holy Spirit.

8:15-17 The benefits of being a child of God

v.15 *Intimacy.* We have access to the Father.

v.16 *Confidence.* We have security in the Father.

v.17 *Inheritance.* We have riches with the Father, but not ease and comfort.

8:18-25 The hope of being a child of God

v.18 Future glory and inheritance overshadows our present suffering.

vv.19-22 Nature is flawed and weakened until we are freed from sin.

v.23 We are flawed and weakened until we are freed from sin.

vv.24-25 This hope gives us patience in suffering

8:26-27 The help for being a child of God

When we are too weak to act like children of God, the Spirit helps.

Example: prayer

Preliminary note: Adoption was a much more customary legal procedure in Roman society than in Hebrew or Near Eastern culture. Paul, being a Roman citizen was quite familiar with the procedure. Adoption usually occurred when a wealthy adult had no heir for his estate. He would then adopt someone as heir — it could be a child or youth or an adult. The moment adoption occurred several things were immediately true of the new son: 1) his old debts and legal obligations were canceled, 2) he got a new name and was instantly heir of all the father had, 3) his new father became instantly liable for all his actions — his debts, crimes, etc., but 4) the new son also had new obligations to honor and please his father. This all lies behind the passage here.

Throughout this passage, Christians are three times called “sons” (*huiioi*) of God (v.14, 15, 19) and three times called “children” (*teknon*) of God (v.16, 17, 21). In our day, only gender neutral language (“children”) is considered appropriate, and referring to men *and* women with a masculine pronoun (“sons”) is considered insensitive. Some people studying this passage may express this as a concern. But we should not try to correct the Scripture. It is true that “sonship” was in Rome a status of privilege and power given only to males. Yet Paul now has the temerity to apply this to “us” — *all* believers! This shows that God does not distinguish in giving honor. *All* Christians, male and

female, are now his heirs. It was a “subversive” thing for Paul to take a masculine-only institution and show that, in Christ, the institution of “empowering-through-adoption” is used on females as well as males without distinction. Christian women should not chafe by being called “sons,” any more than Christian men should chafe when called “brides” (Ephesians 5). We are all sons and all brides. Each metaphor tells us something about our relationship with Christ.

1. vv.14-15 Is everyone a child of God? Why or why not? What does it mean to be ‘led by the Spirit’?

First, the image of “adoption” tells us that no one is born into a true relationship with God. The fact we “receive” (v.15) our sonship, we receive our status, proves that there was a time in which we were lost; we were not naturally his children. (Note: the word *huiiothesias*, translated “sonship” in v.15 means literally to “son-ize.”) This means that this Father-child relationship with God is not automatic. We were originally an orphan or a slave or both.

Secondly, the image of “adoption” tells us that our relationship with God is based completely on a legal act by the Father. You don’t “win” a father, and you don’t “negotiate” for a parent. Adoption is a legal act on the part of the father — it is very expensive and costly only for him. There is nothing the son does to win or earn the status. It is simply *received* (v.15).

Thirdly, v.14 shows us that there what makes us sons of God is that we have the Spirit of God. “Those” who are led *are* the sons of God. The English is fairly clear, but the Greek is even clearer. *Hosoi* (“those”) is very comprehensive, and is best rendered “all those” or “everyone who.” In other words, Paul says in effect, “the body of those who have the Spirit constitute the body of those who are sons of God.” Everyone with the Spirit is adopted by the Father, and no one adopted by the Father will fail to have the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of God hasn’t entered you, you are not God’s son.

Note: It is so important to see the clarity of this teaching, because it is common today to hear people say “all human beings are God’s children” because God created them all. It is true that in Acts 17:29 Paul calls all human beings God’s “offspring.” (The Greek word is *genos*, though, meaning roughly “descendants.” In this sense, we could call Henry Ford the “father” of the Model T.) But the Bible very emphatically reserves all the richness of the term “children of God” only to those who have received Christ as Savior and Lord. Compare John 1:12 – “For as many as received him, as believed on his name, he gave authority to become children [*tekna*] of God.” Sonship is given. No one has it naturally except Jesus Christ.

b) Many want to think that “the leading of the Spirit” has to do with the Spirit helping us to make decisions — guiding us to choose the right spouse, job, living location, etc. But this overlooks the extremely tight connection of v.14 with v.13. The NIV translation shows v.14 as a continuation of a sentence that begins in v.13. In the Greek, v.14 is a new sentence — but it does begin with the word *gar* (“because”), tying what Paul is

about to say to what he just said. In v.13 he says that with the Spirit we really can triumph over the sin within us. Then he explains why this great power — power over sin — is available to us. It is because we are sons or children of God. So “being led by the Spirit” must be the same thing as “putting to death the deeds of the sinful body” of v.13. In other words, we are led to hate the things the Spirit hates (sin) and love the things he loves (Christ). We are thus led of the Spirit.

2. What are the privileges of being an adopted son of God? (Collect from whole passage).

- A. **Security.** Verse 15a: “not... fear, but... sonship.” An employee or a servant basically obeys out of fear of punishment or of loss of job, etc. But a child-parent relationship is not characterized by a fear of losing the relationship. (See more below, question #3).
- B. **Authority.** Verse 15a “not a slave... but sonship.” In a house, slaves have no authority. They can only do what they are told. But children have authority in the house under their parents. The children of God are given authority over sin, over the devil. They are to move about in the world knowing it belongs to their Father. There should be a confidence and poise about them. Children have the honor of the family name. There is a wonderful new status conferred on us.
- C. **Intimacy.** Verse 15b “whereby we cry ‘Abba’.” Here we need to know the original language. “*Abba*” was an Aramaism which is best translated “daddy”— a term of the greatest intimacy.

“‘Abba’ was the word that was used familiarly by children talking to their fathers... A child does not always address his father as ‘father’; he uses terms such as ‘Papa’, ‘Dad’. That is the kind of meaning represented by this word ‘Abba’. It was a...word lisped by a little child... But let us notice the word ‘cry’... we cry ‘Abba, Father’. It is a very strong word, and clearly the Apostle has used it quite deliberately. It means a loud cry... it expresses deep emotion... What then does it imply? Obviously... real knowledge of God. God is no longer to us a distant God. He is not merely a God in whom we believe intellectually, theologically, theoretically, doctrinally only. All this is possible to one who is not a child of God at all... [Our] worship and praying are spontaneous; it is the spontaneity of the child who sees the father... and not only spontaneity, but confidence.

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

- D. **Assurance.** Verse 16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” When we cry out to God as “Abba,” the Spirit of God somehow comes alongside us (with our spirit) and gives us assurance that we truly are in God’s family. There is a lot of debate about the nature of this “testimony,” but it appears to be an inner witness in the heart, a sense that yes, “he really loves me.” (See more below, question #4).

E. **Inheritance.** Verse 17 “now if we are children, then heirs.” This means we have an incredible future. In more ancient times, the first child was the *heir*. There may have been a large number of children, and all the children were loved, but the heir got the largest part of the wealth and carried on the family name. This was the way a great family kept its influence intact and did not have it divided and dissipated. (Paul’s reference should not be read as either supporting or rejecting this practice.) Now in a breathtaking turn, he calls *all* Christians “heirs of God.” This is a miracle of course — because the heir got the lion’s share of the wealth of the parent. Paul is saying that what we have in store for is so grand and glorious that it will be and feel *as if* we each had alone gotten most of the glory of God. (See more below, question #5.)

The following two characteristics of “sons” might be noticed or referred to:

- F. **Discipline.** Verse 17 “now if we are children, then we are heirs... if indeed we share in his sufferings...” Fathers always discipline their children. When parents discipline a child, they allow or introduce a milder form of pain to enter in order to teach/mature the child away from behavior which will lead to far greater pain later. cf. Hebrews 12:5-13: “we had human fathers who disciplined us... but God disciplines us for good...”
- G. **Family resemblance.** Verse 29 (This verse is not inside the chosen passage for study during this session — but someone may notice it and point it out) — “for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren...” This means that, though we are adopted, God is able to actually implant his nature in us. We actually come to resemble our Father in our character, attitudes.

3. v.15. What is the difference between the two “spirits?” List how a slave’s relationship to a head of an estate would specifically differ from that of a son. Which list describes your relationship to God best?

In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), the younger son rejects his family and goes off to squander all his inheritance in riotous living. Then he comes to his senses — he realizes his sin. He decides to return home, but he has no expectation that he is worthy to be called the Father’s son. All he hopes for is to be retained as a hired servant (Luke 15:19). Now it is quite natural for people who approach God to believe the same thing. We say, “Ah — I am certainly not worthy to be a child of God! All I can hope for is to struggle along as an employee of his. In other words, if I perform well, God will “pay me my wages” — he will answer my prayers and give me his favor and protect me. But if I perform poorly, he may fire me. But a child of God is never afraid of being “fired.” Even human parents have a saying: “Well, regardless, she’s still my daughter!” OR “He’s still my son!” The relationship is based on unconditional love, not performance standards.

The “Spirit of Sonship” that Paul speaks of is, therefore, an ability that the Holy Spirit gives us *to approach God as a Father instead as a boss or slavemaster*. In our natural

state we will approach him in a spirit of fear, on a performance-to-standards basis only. But the Holy Spirit wipes away this whole stance. He brings into our hearts the deepest spiritual and psychological security possible — a sense that we can approach God on a family basis, as his beloved children. It is “*by him*” (the Spirit) that we cry ‘Abba’.

“A little child has *confidence*. He does not analyze it... he knows that ‘Abba’ is his father. Grown-ups may be standing back at a distance and being very formal [with some great personage]; but the little child comes running in, rushes right in, and holds on to his father’s legs. He has a right that no-one else has... It is instinctive... we cry ‘Abba, Father’.”

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

Some contrasts:

A slave:

Obeys under compulsion,
because I have to

Works under threat of pain or loss;
punishment “pays back”

Insecurity: if I slip up my master
might beat me

Concentration on external behavior
and compliance with rules

Gets work, but no honor

A child:

Children obey out of love
for and joy in “Daddy”

Discipline is not retribution,
but loving instruction

Security: if I slip up my father
will forgive me

Concentration on relationship and
attitudes

Works, but feels honored

4. v.16. How might the Spirit “testify” with your Spirit that you belong to him?

Paul is responding to the question — “how do we *know* that we are children of God? This is a great claim — how can we be sure it is true?” Paul says that the Spirit bears witness or testifies along with our spirits that we are his. What is this? There are differing views — so let people in your study have their say. Here is one interpretation:

The Greek word translated “testify” is *martyria* (from which we get our word “martyr”). The word originally meant an authoritative witness which solved a difficult case and put the solution to it beyond doubt. The picture Paul is painting goes something like this: there is a trial going on, and the defendant is being accused of a crime. There seems to be some evidence against her and some evidence in favor of her claim that she is innocent. Then suddenly, the defense comes in with some new witness who could be proved to be at the scene of the crime! The witness said, “I was there, and she (the defendant) was not. She is innocent!” This person testifies with the defendant — says the same thing and puts the verdict beyond doubt.

Notice, Paul says *our* spirit is already “testifying.” “The spirit testifies *with* our spirit.” This means we already have evidence that we are Christians. We know we trusted

Christ. We have his promises. We see our lives changing and growing. All these pieces of evidence leads our "spirit" — our hearts — to have a measure of confidence that we really are his. But Paul says that the Spirit can come alongside of us, and in addition to all this that we see, "testify." This seems to refer to a direct testimony of the Spirit in our hearts. This probably is a sense of God's immediate presence and his love that sometimes comes when we pray. We don't get this all the time — or even often. Here are two older writers talking about "the witness of the Spirit."

Sometimes our spirits cannot stand in trials. Therefore sometimes the immediate testimony of the Spirit is necessary. It comes in saying, 'I *am* thy salvation!' and our hearts are stirred up and comforted with joy inexpressible. This joy hath degrees. Sometimes it is so clear and strong that we question nothing — other times doubts come in soon.

– Richard Sibbes

It is no audible voice, but it is a ray of glory filling the soul with God... It is like... that word to Mary. The Lord only said her name, MARY, and filled her soul so she no longer doubted she was his. O how glorious is this manifestation of the Spirit.

– William Guthrie

Here is another helpful word on this subject:

"the witness of the Spirit is related to the cry that issues from our hearts; 'Abba, Father'. It is 'by him' (the Spirit) that we utter this cry... In this very cry for help, the Spirit of God bears witness *with* our spirits that we are indeed God's children. He works in the inner recesses of our being to persuade us that we belong to the father. It is that deep, inward consciousness that comes to the surface in times of crisis..."

5. v.19-22. What are we told about nature here? How does this guide Christians into a unique approach to nature?

First, we are told that nature, *the created order*, has shared somehow in the *Fall* of the human race. v.20 – "the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it..." What are the marks of this "fallen" condition?

- A. **Frustration.** (v.20) Nature is not what it ought to be or what it was created to be. This word "frustration" is the same word translated "vanity" in the Greek version of Ecclesiastes. It means nature is alienated. It is alienated from *us* (because we were originally meant to live in harmony as nature's directors); it is alienated from *itself*. It is not as beautiful and great as it was meant to be.
- B. **Decay.** (v.21 – "in bondage to decay"). Nature is now caught in a continuous cycle of death and decomposition. It is wonderful to see how nature's life-giving quality continually seeks to re-establish itself, bringing new life out of death (e.g. flowers grow from the fertilizer of dead organisms). But the whole universe is deteriorating

and running down, losing more energy than it can generate. Now, everything dies and wears down — nature is now a killer.

- C. **Pain.** (v.22 – “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth”). Literally and metaphorically, the frustration and decay of nature is accompanied by pain and suffering. It is a fact of nature now. There is relentless pain that comes from first to last — as life is born (childbirth) and as life is lost (death) there is pain and misery.

Second, we are told that the created physical *order is going to be redeemed along with the spiritual*. There is a glory coming which will be so blindingly powerful that when it falls upon us, it will envelope the whole created order and glorify it along with us. We will “bring nature with us.” v.19 says *the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed*. Why? Because *the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*. In other words, the three marks of creation in its current condition will be reversed. a) Instead of frustration, there will be *fulfillment*. (When we consider the majesty and greatness of the oceans and the mountains and the valleys and forest *now*, it staggers the mind to imagine what the world will be like when it is no longer “frustrated” but is “free to be itself!”) b) Instead of decay, there will be *strength and newness*. Currently, each moment, things get older, faded, weaker, more incoherent. But in the new heavens and new earth things get newer, more beautiful, stronger, more coherent — every moment forever. c) Instead of pain, there will be *joy*. Looked at in this way, Paul says, even the pain of the present time is really like the pangs of childbirth (v.22). They are not meaningless — the world is giving birth to a new version of itself (cf. Matt.24:8).

What does this mean to a Christian? Christians have a rather unique attitude to nature and the material world. a) Some people see the material world as inherently evil in itself. Such a view is a form of *asceticism*. (Many Christians have this view.) It is therefore considered spiritual to avoid physical pleasures and to withdraw from the world. In this view, art and culture-building are denigrated. b) Other people see the material world as all there is. Such a view is *materialism*. In this view one lives for “creature comforts,” physical pleasure and beauty. Art and culture-building are virtually worshipped. This view has no way to critique nature or the world.

Christians are to see the material world *as inherently good, yet fallen*. It is inherently good. It is clear that it is not “sinful” (v.20 – “the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice...”). It is caught in the web of our treachery. And it is clear that our future is a physical one! God made both the physical and the spiritual, and he is going to redeem both. On the other hand, nature is fallen. Many modern thinkers, want to see decay and death as completely “natural,” and much scientific research tries to define the “normal” as the “right.” Christians know that the world is not yet what God wants it to be.

6. vv.18-23. a) What does Paul say is in store for us as children of God? (Make a list.) b) What assurance does Paul give in the present time that we will come into glory?

a) Our own personal future is touched on in vv.18-23. We will have a glory come upon us. v.19 – “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...” (v.21) “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” What is this “glorious freedom” that will come upon us when we “are revealed” as children of God?

1. The “redemption of our bodies” (v.23b) We will not live in eternity as disembodied intelligences. Jesus’ own post-resurrection appearances show us that we will still be ourselves — yet different. We will be physical, but without the limitations of sinful decay. Jesus’ body was able to pass through locked doors, yet he was able to eat a fish, and he said “I am not a ghost” (Luke 24:36-42).
2. The “sons of God to be revealed” (v.19) We are not sure what this means! But it means our sonship will be publicly revealed and evident. It probably means that we will be finally “conformed to the likeness of the Son” (see Rom.8:29). We will be as gloriously holy as Christ, and thus as blindingly beautiful as he.

Note: Verse 23 says that we await our “adoption” even though v.15 says we already are adopted. How can this be? It means that we are legally adopted, but on that last day, when we get the fullness of the family resemblance in our body and soul (because sin will be eradicated), we will be “revealed” as children of God. It will be a formal celebration and a final healing. And that day can also be looked at as the day of our fullest “adoption.”

b) We are told that the Spirit of God is the “first fruits.” Now the first fruits of an incoming harvest were eaten to get a “foretaste” of what was to come. We know that currently, the Spirit of God is making us internally alive (8:11 – “your spirit is alive because of righteousness”). The Spirit is giving us *gradual, internal* freedom from the effects of sin and death in our spirits. But if this is only the “first fruits,” it means that the Spirit will eventually give us *complete, total* freedom from the effects of sin in death in our bodies-and-spirits. It means that we will be perfect — free from any blemish or weakness or flaw in body and soul.

If we let Him... He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.

– C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

7. vv.23-27. How does the Spirit help in prayer? Have you experienced this?**Describe.**

The general ministry of the Holy Spirit in prayer is much neglected. Yet we are clearly told in Scripture that our access to the Father is not only through the Son, but by the Spirit (Eph.2:18). The Holy Spirit's inspiration is as necessary as the Son's mediation if we are to gain access to the Father in prayer...

It seems to be this. Sometimes, when believers do not know how to pray in words, they groan without words... 'we find ourselves brought to silence by the very intensity of our longings...' These unutterable sighs or groans are not to be despised, as if we ought to put them into language. On the contrary, when we thus sigh with inarticulate desires, it is the Holy Spirit interceding on our behalf, prompting these [deep longings].

– John R.W. Stott

Romans

Facing life with confidence

Study 15 | Romans 8:28-39

Summary

8:28 – What our confidence is:

The sovereignty of God in history. His purpose in all circumstances is for our best. No opposition will harm us.

8:29-30 – How our confidence comes:

The certainty of God's salvation. He saves us in stages. No flaw or evil will remain in us.

8:31-39 – Why our confidence is:

The adequacy of God. Nothing inside or outside will separate us from him.

Five unanswerable questions:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| v.31: God's power. | <i>If God is for us, who can be against us?</i> |
| v.32: God's generosity. | <i>He did not spare his own son... how will he not also give us... all...?</i> |
| v.33: God's pardon. | <i>Who will bring any charge?... it is God who justifies...</i> |
| v.34: Christ's work. | <i>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus who died... was raised... intercedes...</i> |
| v.35: Christ's love. | <i>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?</i> |
| vv.36-39: | The answer to all the questions. No one and no thing! |

Remember that in 8:17-18 Paul has begun talking about how a Christian can face the sufferings and temptations of life with overwhelming confidence.

- 1. v.28 In what ways does a belief in the promise of v.28 affect the way we face a) the good and, b) bad circumstances, and even c) the failures and sins of our lives?**

The good

It leads us to gratitude and joy for even the "routine" good things in life. Notice, Paul does not say "things" work together for good by themselves! Only *God* makes the factors of life turn to our good. Christians do not believe the world is a nice place nor that life by nature will be happy. Many people are shocked and disillusioned by the tragedies and hardness of life. Not Christians. We don't expect things in life to "work together" for good. When we find things working out beneficially for us, it is all God, all grace, all him. When things work out, Christians never say, "of course — that's as it should be!" Rather, they wonder and praise God for it. Sum: Christians can maintain a positive view of life without adopting a saccharine, sentimental and unrealistic view of things.

The bad

First, *it removes general fear and anxiety*. If God is “working” in “all things,” then it means his plan includes what we would call “little” things or “senseless” things. Ultimately there are no accidents. Compare Proverbs 16:33 – “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal thereof is from the Lord.” God must be “working in” even flips of a coin. This must lead to some ability to relax! We are not in the grip of blind chance or fate. The Greeks thought that even Zeus was subject to the fates — not us! The universe is not a mechanism run by blind chance, but is run by a person — the Father. Sum: We don’t need to fear life and circumstances.

“... it is one of the most glorious things we can ever know about ourselves. Do you know that as a Christian all things are working together for good for you? Do you know that God is over-ruling everything in the whole cosmos for your good?... You cannot know it and be depressed at the same time; for such knowledge and depression are mutually exclusive.”

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:28-30

Second, *it helps us see God’s purpose in difficulties*. If God is working for our “good” in *everything*, then we see that *both* the good things *and* the bad things serve the purpose of furthering the good in our life. This wonderful text leads to the following logical deduction by John Newton made years ago:

“Everything is necessary that he sends; nothing can be necessary that he withholds.”

This means that if we think we require some *good* thing that God has withheld from us — in reality we don’t absolutely need it. It also means that if we feel our life has been ruined by some *bad* thing — in reality it is playing some very important role in your life. It is teaching you, molding you, enriching you, humbling you, and so on. Sum: We learn to look at the troubles in our life as being part of God’s loving purpose for us.

Third, *it gives us a balanced view of suffering*. This verse shows us a balance that people have seldom maintained toward suffering. On the one hand, there are people who despair in suffering and say, “nothing good can come out of this!” This text denies that. On the other hand there are people (including many Christians) who *embrace* suffering. They see it as a good thing — to make them noble or to make them feel more virtuous than others. But the text does not say that the “things” are good — but that God works them “for the good.” Difficulties are not to be enjoyed or welcomed! *They* are not good, but their results can be.

The failures

It gives us confidence that we cannot really ruin God’s good purposes for us. “All” really means all. That means we have to say that it includes even our backsliding and our sin. Now sin is always bad, always a terrible thing, and we will always live to regret the painful consequences in our lives that sin always brings. But God is so great that he weaves it into our ultimate good. He can use even our sins and failures to humble us and teach us what we need to do to bring us to our final glory. He makes use of sin to show Christians our weakness, frailty and fallibility.

2. v.28 What does Paul say are the two conditions for receiving this promise? What does each term mean?

It is easy to overlook that the promise that “all things work for good” is made only to “those who *love* him, who have been called.” There are two ways to describe the same people — Christians, but they are both important.

a) Those who love him, ordinarily in the Bible, means people *who have made a commitment to live for him*. A commitment means to serve God out of recognition and appreciation of who he is in himself. Cf. John 14:21– “He that has my commandments and does them, he it is that loves me.” Love in the Bible is never merely theoretical (only intellectual) nor merely sentimental (only emotional) nor merely volitional (only duty). Love is setting the heart on God so that in all you do you determine to please him.

“I believe that Paul had a special reason for using the term ‘love’ rather than the term ‘believing’ at this point. One of the best ways whereby we can decide immediately if we really *love* God or not is our reaction to adversity... there are many people who... when trials and tribulations arise... they give up. They feel they have been let down.”

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:28-30

If you love God for who he is in himself, you make a commitment and you endure difficulty. If, rather, you are using God, then when suffering comes you bail out.

b) *Those who are called according to his purpose*. This term probably does not mean everyone who has ever heard the message or the challenge of the gospel. (Anyone who has ever heard the gospel has, in a general sense, been ‘called’. But it would not make sense that anyone who has never even heard of Christ would get this promise.) As verse 30 shows, a certain number of people are “called.” That is, God has brought us to himself.

3. v.28 What does this text imply is the effect of “all things” on those who don’t love God? Why do you think the effect is different on them?

Since Paul says that the entirety of life’s circumstances (all things”) work for “the good” of only those who love God, there is the strong implication that they do not work for the good of those outside God. Since the text says that *both* the good and the bad things of our lives have a good effect on us because of how God overrules and uses them in our lives, it looks as if *both* the good and bad things that happen to a non-Christian work ill for those outside God.

How could that be? Paul very directly says about the rebellious that God “gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts” (Romans 1:24). This is startling. Paul is saying that one of the worst punishments God gives people is to let them have the desires of their sinful hearts. He lets them have what they want. This means that “good” things are bad for those who don’t love God. Why? People outside of God already have the illusion that they are self-made people who are in control of their lives. At least bad

circumstances wake us up to our true humanity and our actual condition as dependent, mortal, contingent creatures. But when an unbelieving heart experiences a string of successes and pleasures, it only reinforces this illusion and can make the worst sins in the human heart — pride, over-confidence, self-centeredness, etc. — grow and take over.

“Good” circumstances, therefore, can harden and delude, develop weak, selfish character and set a person up for disaster; “bad” circumstances can humble and educate and develop strong, compassionate character and prepare a person better for life. Good circumstances can be terrible for you, and bad circumstances wonderful for you. An example:

“Lest I should be too puffed up through the abundance of the revelations I received, there was given me a thorn in the flesh...” (2 Cor. 12)

There is a proverb that applies to this. *The same sun that melts wax, hardens clay. In other words, what makes a life “good” is not a particular set of circumstances but how they interact with the heart.* All by itself, this is a major principle for understanding and living life. Shakespeare was getting at it when he said, “the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves.” It is not as important to change our circumstances as it is to change our heart’s attitude and stance toward them.

4. vv.29-30 How does vv.29-30 explain what God’s ultimate “purpose” in history is, and also what our ultimate “good” is in vv.28?

The word “for” shows the close connection to v.28. vv.29-30 are actually Paul’s explanation of what God’s “purpose” actually *is* — what God is “working out” in all the circumstances of life. Why did Paul add verses 29 and 30 instead of leaving us only v.28? Because v.28 is *not* meant to tell us that when we have troubles, they will just “work out” in some general or abstract sense. Rather, he means *everything that happens to us is working out for our final and ultimate sanctification and holiness and salvation.* Everything is working together so we will be “conformed to the likeness of his son.” This shows us that “the good” God *always* is working for us is character change. He is making us as loving, noble, true, wise, strong, good, joyful and kind as Jesus is.

This is an extremely important interpretation of v.28. Some people read v.28 as teaching that God gives more good things or different kinds of circumstances to Christians over non-Christians, but he is not really saying that. Paul is not promising Christians an easier or more comfortable life. He is not saying that Christians will have a higher percentage of “pleasant” over “unpleasant” circumstances than unbelievers. Rather, Paul says that “all things” — the same basic range of good and bad things which happen to all people — God uses in our hearts so we are taught, humbled, and refined into the likeness of Christ. As we said above, the same circumstances have a different effect on unbelievers.

So God’s purpose for all of history is seen in this phrase, “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” It is an astounding statement. It teaches:

- a. He is “conforming” us. It means God has a master design or form (“his Son”), and now every circumstance — “all things” — is designed to shape, polish, melt, smooth, sculpt, frame, cast and contour us into that master design. He is re-pouring us into the mold of Christ’s perfect greatness. The idea of “form” does not mean a superficial likeness, but something total. We are being remade from the inside out, from the depths. It is a likeness of essence. Compare: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” – 2 Cor. 3:18
- b. We will be his “brethren.” We are not just legally adopted into God’s family (see 8:15), but we are also getting his “family resemblance.” We are told that when we are born again, we get God’s very nature, his “DNA.” (II Peter 1:4 “you may participate in the divine nature.”) Through the circumstances of life, God is drawing that out and shaping us into brothers and sisters of Christ, who resemble him and our father. Compare: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says: ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.’ – Heb.2:10-12

Ultimately, the proof of a right approach to these doctrines is that you find in them the greatest urge to holiness and sanctification. If your belief of these doctrines has not driven you to holiness you are in a dangerous condition... You are misusing them to say, ‘Well, it is all right with me, it matters not therefore what I do. I am saved...’ No one can truly see these doctrines without being humbled

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:28-30 (p.202)

5. vv.29-30 How many groups or sets of people is he talking about in vv.29-30? List the five active verbs in vv.29-30 that describe what God does to this group. What does each term mean (remembering that this is the same group of people)?

The key “controlling insight” for understanding the words: *each verb describes the same set of people*. It is not “some of those he foreknew he called, some he called he glorified, etc.” Rather, the same group he foreknows, he also predestines, calls, justifies and glorifies. “Those he foreknew he also predestined,” etc. This helps us define what each term means.

A paraphrase of the five “links”:

- 1. “Foreknow” God sets his love on us.
- 2. “Predestine” God plans a glorious destination for us.
- 3. “Called” God works his plan out in time.
“Justified”
- 4. “Glorified” God completes the plan in eternity.

- A. *Foreknowledge*. It is common for people to think of “foreknowledge” as merely “foresight,” that God in his omniscience knows the future, and knows who will choose him. But if that were the case, vv.29-30 would be claiming that everyone would be saved! Refer to the “controlling insight.” Paul says “those he foreknew, he also predestined... called... justified... glorified...” Paul does not say “*some* of those he foreknew.” If it means “foresee,” then everyone God foresees (and he foresees everyone) would be glorified. But that is not the case. In the Bible, when we are told God “knows” someone, it means he has set his love in a personal way on them. (E.g. when Jesus says to some, “I never *knew* you” Matt.7:23, he doesn’t mean he doesn’t know *about* them, but that he has no relationship to them.) Therefore “foreknow” means “forelove.” A survey of the other places “foreknow” is used (Acts 2:23, Rom.11:2, I Pet 1:20) show this. Thus, *God set his love on us way back before the beginning of time.*
- B. *Predestinate*. This means just what it appears to mean in English. To predestine means that we set a destination for ourselves or someone else. It means to make a plan ahead of time. In Greek the word is *prohorizo* — meaning to determine a horizon and to set out for it. This means that God, because of his love for us, has set a destination for us — to be with him in glory, conformed to the likeness of Christ.
- C. *Called*. (We mentioned this above under question #2b.) Though in the gospels we read, “many are called but few are chosen.” In that sense, “the called” are any who have heard the Christian proclamation, but that could not be the sense in which Paul uses it here. (For one thing, in v.28, “the called” are people who “love God.”) Refer again to the “controlling insight.” In v.29, “the called” is the same group who are “justified” and “glorified” — thus anyone who is called by God in this sense *must* eventually become justified and glorified. This is therefore an internal illumination that God sends us to awaken us to the truth. A perfect example — in I Thess.1:4-5 Paul says, “We know that he has chosen you...” How could he know that? He goes on, “because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” Notice — though Paul has preached to many people, those who respond with deep conviction only do so because they are “chosen.” They are called by God through Paul’s sermon.
- D. *Justified*. To be “justified” is to be pronounced and treated by God as legally righteous and blameless because of the work of Jesus Christ in his life and death — which is transferred to us when we believe in him. (Since the whole book of Romans is about this — let’s not spend any time here!) But here in v.30 we see that justification is not an isolated incident, but it is inextricably linked to the whole plan of God’s purpose and activity, beginning in eternity, coming into time/history, and ending again in eternity. v.30 shows us that no one is justified unless he or she is also foreknown, called, etc.
- E. *Glorified*. To be glorified means to have all sin eradicated and be made perfect in body and soul. Paul already spoke of this condition in 8:11 — “and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies...” and also in 8:20-21.

6. vv.28-31 Why can Paul use the past tense “glorified” when speaking of Christians? What does this tell us about the certainty of our final salvation?

Here are some commentator’s quotes on Romans:

“The tense in the last word [‘glorified’] is amazing. It is the most daring anticipation of faith that even the New Testament contains.”

– Denney

“The Apostle deliberately uses this aorist [past] tense in order to give us this final unshakeable assurance. In the mind of God, [glorification] has already been done — it is as certain as our justification... Glorification is irrevocable, it is absolutely certain. Nothing can cause it to fail, for it is the action of God.”

– Lloyd-Jones

“...the past tense being used, as the other past tenses, is to imply the completion in the divine counsel of all these — which to us, in a state of time, seem so many steps — simultaneously and irrevocably.”

– Alford

In short, Paul can use the term “glorified” in the past tense because it is just as certain as any other part of the purpose. The links in the “chain” (foreknow-call-glorify) cannot be broken. They all go together.

Things future, nor things that are now,
Not all things below or above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from his love.

– A. Toplady

7. vv.31-39 Paraphrase each of the five questions Paul poses (vv.31-35)? Summarize Paul’s answer (vv.36-39) to the questions. How does the answer depend on the doctrine of v.28-30? What is the practical purpose of the questions?

a) v.31 “If God is for us, who can be against us?” If the God who has purposed our glory is all powerful — why are we afraid of any opposition at all?

v.32 “He did not spare his own son... how will he not also give us all...?” If the God who has purposed our glory is willing to give up his most precious possession — his Son — why worry about our needs?

v.33 “Who will bring any charge?... it is God who justifies...” If the God who has purposed our glory has declared us righteous — why ever be guilty or unforgiven?

v.34 “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus who died... was raised... intercedes...” If the Christ who died a perfect death and lived a perfect life is standing before the Father in our behalf, why ever be guilty or unforgiven?

v.35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” This is the last question because all the other questions were really just other versions of this one. *The only thing that we would really have to fear — that would really harm us — is to be separated from the love of Christ. And since that can’t happen, why fear anything?*

b) vv.36-39. The answer to all the questions: Nothing!

c) The only way we can be sure that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ is if we believe that God loves us simply because of his choice, and not because of anything in us that distinguishes us from others or merits his attention in any way.

At this point in the discussion, many questions about predestination will arise. Though Paul is very clearly teaching it here, many participants in the Bible study will raise the five or six common objections that ordinarily get raised. This is not the place to go into all of those. We will address them more fully in Teaching F (Does God Control Everything?) Also, Romans 9-11 will deal with these issues. For the present, remember that Paul’s *main* point is not to raise the old determinism-free will controversy, which is a philosophical problem. Rather he is stating firmly that we must face life — not only troubles but even our own sin — with a towering, infallible confidence! The Almighty God of the universe has purposed to make us perfectly holy and gloriously happy (these two things are inextricably linked) — and literally *nothing* can thwart God’s purpose for us!

Consider how practical Paul is being. He is saying, “Friend, have you been called? Have you found the gospel coming home to your soul with power? Have you asked for God to justify you? Fine! Now realize this — that would not and could not have happened unless the great God of heaven had now set his love upon you in the depths of eternity before time, and is now infallibly working out his plan to live with you forever in his family.” Yes, Paul is, therefore, teaching “predestination,” but you should not so quickly think of the philosophical issues. See his point. Unless you believe your salvation is strictly and totally due to the plan of God, you cannot be absolutely certain about life and the future. If his love for you is contingent or dependent in any measure upon your prior action or attitude, then who knows whether you will continue to merit his love?

So for the present, leave the philosophical issues aside and rejoice.

“Everyone who is eventually saved can only ascribe his salvation from the first step to the last to God’s favor and act. Human merit must be excluded: and this can only be by tracing back the work far beyond the obedience which evidences (or the faith which appropriates) salvation — even to an act of spontaneous favor on the part of God.”

– C.J.Vaugh

d) The purpose of the questions is to almost beat us out of our disbelief that we are saved totally by grace and that we are therefore completely safe and should face life without any fear. It is incredible, relentless, intense logic — it is logic on fire. Paul is saying, “Think! Are you afraid (v.31) — you aren’t thinking! Are you worried (v.32) — you aren’t thinking! Are you guilty (v.33) — you aren’t thinking! See the logic of free grace and justification! These aren’t dry doctrines— they are life itself. And if you are not living with overwhelming assurance and power, you haven’t really understood them.”

TEACHING E

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Living as sons and daughters of God

Introduction

In Romans 8:15 we read, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship [adoption].” Although the concept of “adoption” is not introduced in Romans until this point, the contrast in v.15 is a summation of all Paul has been saying up until this point about the two basic ways to live. The two fundamentally different ways to live are not as religious or as irreligious; but as a slave, full of fear, or as a child of God, full of faith working through love. In chapter 6 Paul pits life “under the law” against life “under grace” — this is the same as being “a slave” or “a child of God.” In chapter 2 he showed us that to continue to live “under the law” in slavery/fear is just as possible for a moral and religious person as for an immoral and skeptical person.

Paul says we must not live “according to the sinful nature” (8:13). Why? Because, “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again.” It is clearly possible, then, to fall back and live as slaves even though we are children. This is the same as forgetting we are not “under the law” and living as if we are (6:14). The purpose of the book of Romans is to get Christians to see their position as justified and adopted sons and daughters of God, and then to begin living as such.

There is a two-part “dynamic” to Christian growth. (It is, in a sense, a “combustion cycle.” If it is ignited and going in the heart it results in dynamic character growth.) The two parts are a “negative” and a “positive.” We see them mentioned many places:

Colossians 3:

v.1 – Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated... who is your life...

v.5 – Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature... which is idolatry...

Hebrews 12:

v.2 – Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith... sat down at the right hand of God...

v.1 – Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...

Romans 8:

v.5 – their minds set on what the Spirit desires... (v.14) those led of the Spirit are sons of God...

v.13 – if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live...

The “negative” side is repentance, to discover the particular idolatries of the heart (Col.3:5), our besetting sins (Heb.12:1), and uproot them at the motivational level (Rom.8:13). The “positive” side is faith, to see ourselves as perfect in Christ (Col.3:1), who has done from first to last all that was required for my acceptance (Heb.12:2), so that we could be adopted as sons and daughters of God (Rom.8:14). This is the dynamic — a) we uproot the idols of the heart, and b) we live out of our identity as children of God.

These two elements must go together. Each stimulates the other; if either one is de-emphasized it robs the other also of any power. To lose either one is to eliminate the joy and release of a gospel-empowered heart. How? On the one hand, without a knowledge of our extreme sin and idolatry, the payment of Christ on the cross seems trivial, and the message of it does not electrify or transform. On the other hand, without a knowledge of our complete acceptance and adoption through Christ, the message of our sin would so crush us that we would deny or repress it. But — the more you know of his infallible fatherly love, the more you are able to realistically face yourself, your flaws and faults, and the more you see your sin, the more precious and valuable do you find his saving love and grace.

Since in Teaching D we looked at how to identify idols (the “negative” part of the growth dynamic), in this teaching we look at how to live as a child of God.

PART I. UNDERSTANDING OUR ADOPTION

A. The importance of adoption.

“The notion that we are children of God, His own sons and daughters... is the mainspring of Christian living... Our sonship to God is the apex of Creation and the goal of redemption.”

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. [Adoption] is the highest privilege the gospel offers... That justification — by which we mean God’s forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance of the future — is the primary and fundamental blessing is not in question... But... adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.”

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“According to the Scriptures, pardon, acceptance, and adoption are distinct privileges, the one rising above the other in the order in which they have been stated... while the first two properly belong to (the sinner’s) justification, as being both founded on the same relation [with God] as a Ruler-and-Subject, the third is radically distinct from them,

as being founded on a nearer, more tender, more endearing relation [with God] as Father-and-child... The privilege of adoption presupposes pardon and acceptance, but is higher than either..."

– James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*

B. Objections to and distortions of adoption

"I have heard it seriously argued that the thought of divine fatherhood can mean nothing to those whose human father was inadequate, lacking wisdom, affection or both, nor to those many more whose misfortune it was to have a fatherless upbringing... But this is silly. For it is just not true to suggest that in the realm of personal relations, positive concepts cannot be formed by contrast... The truth is that all of us have a positive ideal of fatherhood by which we judge our own and others' fathers [how else could we be unhappy with our bad fathers?], and it can safely be said that the person for whom the thought of God's perfect fatherhood is meaningless or repellent does not exist."

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

"In the sense that God is the Creator of all things, it is true that the Bible sometimes speaks of His Fatherhood. He is the 'Father of the heavenly lights' (James 1:17) and the One who brought the universe to birth. But that is not the most common usage... We are not, by nature, children of God. We need to become his children... In fact, by nature, we are children of wrath, not children of God (Ephesians 2:3).

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

"The idea that all are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere... The gift of sonship to God becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again. 'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God.' (Jn.1:12-13) Sonship to God, then, is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but an adoptive sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures it."

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

C. Adoption defined

"Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption... Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice, in which He says:

'You are my son, today I have brought you into my family.'"

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have His name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him, as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.”

– *Westminster Confession*, chap 12

“The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and placed in a new relationship of son to his new father... All his old debts are canceled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family... [On the one hand, the new father] owned all the [new offspring’s] property, controlled his personal relationships, and had the rights of discipline. On the other hand, the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee, and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance.”

– Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, and Sons*

“In Roman law, it was a recognized practice for an adult who wanted an heir, and someone to carry on the family name, to adopt a male as his son... The apostles proclaim that God has so loved those whom he redeemed on the cross that he has adopted them all as his heirs, to see and share the glory into which his only begotten Son has already come. ‘God sent his Son... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights as sons.’ (Gal.4:4-5): we, that is, who were ‘foreordained to adoption as sons...’ (Eph.1:5). ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.’ (1 Jn.3:1-2).

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

D. Biblical theology of adoption

“God and religion are not less than they were; the Old Testament revelation of the holiness of God, and its demand for humility in man, is presupposed throughout, but something has been added. A new factor has come in; New Testament believers deal with God as their Father.

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“According to our Lord’s own testimony in John’s Gospel, God’s fatherly relation to him implied four things. [1] First, fatherhood implied authority. The Father commands and disposes; the initiative which he calls his Son to exercise is the initiative of resolute obedience to his Father’s will... (6:38; 17:4; 5:19; 4:34). [2] Second, fatherhood implies

affection. 'The Father loves the Son.' 'The Father hath loved me...' (5:20; 15:9-10). [3] Third, fatherhood implied fellowship. 'I am not alone, for my Father is with me.' 'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone...' (16:32; 8:29). [4] Fourth, fatherhood implied honor. God wills to exalt his Son. 'Father... Glorify your Son.' 'The Father... has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son...' (17:1; 5:22-23). All this extends to his adopted children. In, through, and under Jesus Christ their Lord, they are ruled, loved, companied, and honored by their heavenly Father..." ['Father... let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...' (17:23-24).

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

E. The Spirit of sonship

"[We all have a native] inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God's grace and love... We are slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are in danger of having the mindset of hired servants. Furthermore, if there is nothing else the Devil can do to mar our joy in Christ, he will try to produce in us what our forefathers used to call a 'bondage frame of spirit'... That is why he sends us the Spirit of adoption. What is [that]? Paul says,

'You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father' (Rom.8:15-16)

Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit... [which] brings us into a deep-seated persuasion that we really are the sons of God. If it is a fact that... God has adopted us into his family, then the Spirit assures us this is true, and enables us to live in the enjoyment of such a rich spiritual blessing... He sends his Spirit into our hearts, bringing us the deep spiritual and psychological security that rests on the objective fact that our sins are forgiven and we belong to the Lord."

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

[An example of the Spirit of sonship]:

The problem: "Because I did not believe God loved me on the basis of Christ's life, death, and resurrection —

The result: [therefore] I could not face the risk of seeing my sins as my own responsibility. So [1.] having tried to clear my conscience by blaming others, I [2.] turned on the afterburners and made myself busy with work and duty. Or to use Luther's analogy, I was full of active righteousness. I looked to my outward activity to feel good about myself, and judged others by my own active standards...

The turning: But now I understood what Luther was talking about: 'in the righteousness of faith we work nothing, we render nothing to God, but we only receive and allow another to work in us.' This is what he called a "passive righteousness' — a righteousness that is credited to our account through faith. This was Christ's

righteousness, bought with the price of his blood on the cross. This I received by faith. The reason it had been so difficult for me to have a personal faith in Christ was that I had not experienced total forgiveness. But I had now brought real sins — including my attitudes of self-dependence and blame-shifting — to a real Savior, and they had been forgiven... How awesome it is to be loved unconditionally by a holy, righteous God.

– Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom*

F. Responsibilities of adopted children:

“Sonship, [therefore] must be the controlling thought — the normative category, if you like — at every point.” (J.I.Packer). Here are all the responsibilities or duties of the Christian life recast and understood in terms of sonship:

1. New motivation

“If the love of a father will not make a child delight in him, what will?”

– John Owen, *Communion with God*

“A perfect man would never act from sense of duty; he’d always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and of other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a [healthy] leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits, etc.) can do the journey on their own.”

– C.S. Lewis *Letters* 18 July 1957

2. Obedience

“[The Sermon on the Mount] teaches Christian conduct not by giving a full scheme of rules and a detailed casuistry, to be followed with mechanical precision, but by indicating a broad and general way the spirit, direction and objectives, the guiding principles and ideals, by which the Christian must steer his course. It is often noted that this is... quite different from the tax-consultant type of instruction which was the stock-in-trade of Jewish lawyers and scribes in our Lord’s day. What is less often noticed is that it is precisely the kind of moral instruction that parents are constantly trying to give their children — concrete, imaginative, teaching general principles from particular instances, and seeking all the time to bring the children to appreciate and share the parent’s own attitudes and view of life... The all-embracing principles of conduct: [1] imitating the Father...(Mt.5:44-45,48)... [2] glorifying the Father [bringing him honor and credit before others] (Mt. 5:16; 6:9)... [3] pleasing the Father... (Mt.6:1).

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

3. Family resemblance

“‘Gospel holiness’... was Puritan shorthand for authentic Christian living, springing from love and gratitude to God, in contrast with the spurious ‘legal holiness’ that consisted merely of forms, routines and outward appearances, maintained from self-regarding

motives... [Gospel holiness] is simply a matter of a child of God being true to type, [resembling the Father]... expressing one's adoption in one's life... while it is certainly true that justification frees one forever from the need to keep the law as a means of earning life, it is equally true that adoption obliges us to keep the law as the means of pleasing one's newfound Father. Law-keeping [is transformed now, it is] the family likeness of God's children... [Now] the sins of God's children do not destroy their justification or nullify their adoption, but they mar the children's fellowship with [and their family likeness to] the Father..."

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

4. Trust

"All Christians are, in fact, called to a life of faith, in the sense of following God's will at whatever cost and trusting him for the consequences. But all are tempted to put status and security, in human terms, before loyalty to God; and then, if they resist that temptation, they are at once tempted to worry about the likely effect of their stand... On those thus tempted in the life of faith, Jesus brings the truth of their adoption to bear...' Do not worry about your life... your heavenly Father knows what you need...' (Mt.6:31-33)

5. Acceptance of discipline

"In this world, royal children have to undergo extra training and discipline which other children escape, in order to fit them for their high destiny. It is the same with the children of the King of kings. The clue to understanding all his dealings with them is to remember that throughout their lives he is training them for what awaits them, and chiseling them into the image of Christ."

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

"Faith and presumption look alike because both qualities are characterized by confidence, but faith begins in the recognition and acceptance of our total human weakness... Presumption... is a reliance on human moral abilities and religious accomplishments... A mix of presumption and faith produces a personal instability that surfaces in crises and major life transitions... Presumptive faith must have positive circumstances and feelings of success based on visible accomplishments. So when God wants to reach us, he must take away those favorable circumstances and accomplishments. He hits hard at our false trusts, [false 'righteousnesses', things we get our strength from looking at]... Like the orphan we cry, 'I am abandoned' when in fact God's grace is pursuing us ever more intensely... [In sum,] presumptive self-trust prevails [in so many lives]. You can detect this attitude in yourself by your response to life when it goes out of control. If you handle it by blaming others, refusing to learn from God, becoming defensive and angry, you have the self-trust of an orphan, not the faith of a son or daughter."

– Rose M. Miller, *From Fear to Freedom*

G. Privileges of adopted children:

“Sonship, [therefore] must be the controlling thought — the normative category, if you like — at every point.” (J.I.Packer). Here are all the privileges or blessings of the Christian life recast and understood in terms of sonship:

1. Assurance

“Social experts drum into us these days that the family unit needs to be stable and secure, and that any unsteadiness in the parent-child relationship takes its toll in strain, neurosis and arrested development in the child himself. The depressions, randomness and immaturities that mark children of broken homes are know to us all. But... in God’s family... you have absolute stability and security. The very concept of adoption is itself proof and guarantee of the preservation of the saints, for only bad fathers throw their children out of the family, even under provocation...”

– J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

“Although [the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15] is probably the best known and loved of all Christ’s parables, the lesson it teaches us... is often overlooked. Jesus was underlining the fact that... the reality of the love of God for us is often the last thing in the world to dawn on us. As we fix our eyes upon ourselves, our past failures, our present guilt, it seems impossible that the Father should love us. Many Christians go through much of their life with the prodigal’s suspicion. Their concentration is upon their sin and failure; all their thoughts are introspective. That is why in the Greek text John’s statement about the Father’s love begins... Behold! — look and see. [“Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God!” I John 3:1]

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

2. Prayer and intimacy

“‘Abba’ was the word that was used familiarly by children talking to their fathers... A child does not always address his father as ‘father’; he uses terms such as ‘Papa’, ‘Dad’. That is the kind of meaning represented by this word ‘Abba’. It was a... word lisped by a little child... But let us notice the word ‘cry’... we cry ‘Abba, Father’. It is a very strong word, and clearly the Apostle has used it quite deliberately. It means a loud cry... it expresses deep emotion... What then does it imply? Obviously... real knowledge of God. God is no longer to us a distant God. He is not merely a God in whom we believe intellectually, theologically, theoretically, doctrinally only. All this is possible to one who is not a child of God at all... [Our] worship and praying are spontaneous; it is the spontaneity of the child who sees the father... and not only spontaneity, but confidence. “A little child has confidence. He does not analyze it... he knows that ‘Abba’ is his father. Grown-ups may be standing back at a distance and being very formal [with some great personage]; but the little child comes running in, rushes right in, and holds on to his father’s legs. He has a right that no-one else has... It is instinctive... we cry ‘Abba, Father’.”

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17*

“This is what prayer really means: knowing that we have a secure relationship with God in which we can address him in the knowledge that he cares, and has the power to aid us... Jesus encourages us to pray simply. This distinguishes the child of God from the hypocrite. The hypocrite is so unsure of his relationship with God (and rightly so!) that he thinks of prayer in terms of its length and eloquence; the child of God knows he is speaking to the Father, and talks simply and directly... Jesus also encourages us to pray boldly... Boldness [which is] impudence in a neighbor is the privilege of the children of the family.”

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

3. Freedom and confidence

“The parable of the prodigal son epitomizes the disposition of some Christians, even when they are restored to fellowship with God. Lurking in their hearts there often remains this sneaking suspicion: ‘I am not worthy to be God’s son, but perhaps I can struggle through as one of his hired servants’ [see Luke 15:19]. At the root of such thinking is an inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God’s grace and love. We contribute nothing to it; we can do nothing to earn it in any way. We are often slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are [always] in danger of having the mindset of hired servants... the Devil... will try to produce in us what our forefathers called ‘a bondage frame of spirit’... [When Paul says in Romans 8:15 that God sends us ‘a Spirit of sonship’ rather than a spirit of fear, he means] God sends His Spirit into our hearts, bringing us the deep spiritual and psychological security that rests on the objective fact that... we belong to the Lord.”

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

4. Fellowship and connection

“We are to learn to accept and appreciate one another, no matter what natural differences might separate us... Rich and poor alike are to be treated as brothers... [We are to never give up on one another — to both confront and forgive in proportions as great as required.] Such a mixture of discipline and forgiveness is conceivable only within a family context... No family finds failure easy to handle... [But] only when we realize that the Church is a family, that we are brothers and sisters in that family, will we have a right perspective from which to view those who fail badly, and a right motive to see them disciplined faithfully, and welcomed back with many reaffirmations of our love... These are all part of what it means to ‘keep on loving each other as brothers.’ (Heb.13:1)”

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

5. Inheritance

“Adoption is incomplete in this world. John says that... we are God’s children, but it does “not yet appear what we shall be” in the future... (I John 3:1-3). Similarly, Paul teaches that although we have already received the Spirit of adoption... (Romans 8:15), we are still waiting for the full experience of our sonship, for ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (Romans 8:21). The redemption of our bodies, our adoption in all its glory, takes place at the final resurrection. Then... the image [family resemblance] now under repair will be completed.”

– Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*

“The doctrine of our adoption tells us that the sum and substance of our promised inheritance is a share in the glory of Christ. We shall be made like our elder brother at every point, and sin and mortality, the double corruption of God’s good work in the moral and spiritual spheres respectively, will be things of the past. ‘Co-heirs with Christ... that we may also share in his glory’ (Rom.8:17). ‘Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.’ (I Jn.3:2).”

– J.I.Packer, *Knowing God*, chap 19

SUMMARY: WHAT IS THE SLAVE VS. CHILD MENTALITY?

Different understanding

Slave: False definitions — a whole different religion!

Child: True definitions

Slave: “Grace” is God’s maintaining your strength and power to live a better life.

Child: Grace is a transforming power; to be melted by spiritual understandings of gospel truth.

Slave: “Faith” is trying hard to do good and be better, establishing your own record (a ‘righteousness’) so God and others will accept you.

Child: Faith is a discipline of remembering and living every moment as an accepted child of God.

Slave: “Obedience” focuses nearly completely on external duties. Examination of attitudes and motivations is too traumatic and is ignored.

Child: Obedience is seeking to please God first in our attitude of love, then in obeying his will. Concentration on principles and attitudes.

Different lifestyle

Slave: Fear-based life

Child: Faith working through love

Slave: Compulsive obedience. Obeys God and moral codes out of fear of rejection — a compulsive, driven moralism. “Driveness.” Unrealistic goals. Often a lot of self-criticism.

Child: Obeys out of joy in your Father and out of gratitude for the certainty of his love. “How can I live so ungratefully to one who will never reject me?”

Slave: Controlled by people. Expectations and opinions of others become the real moral standard. We are controlled by what people think.

Child: Integrity and courage is easier. “The only person whose opinion counts is my Father! Who cares what the rest think?”

Slave: Hiding. Lots of strategies to hide our inner and outer failings from ourselves and one another. Including: gossip, blame-shifting, anger at other races/classes, obsessions, overwork, etc.

Child: Open and transparent. Freedom from having to put up a front. Able to appreciate people who are different and hurting.

Slave: Isolation. Growing feeling that no one understands, that no one cares, no one can be trusted.

Child: Because of openness and transparency, a lack of self-pity.

Slave: Despair in troubles. Sees difficulties as “pay backs” from God. Result is either guilt (because there’s an awareness of moral failure) or bitterness (because there’s a feeling of moral accomplishment).

Child: Learns to see discipline as fatherly, loving instruction, preparing us for future tests. Learns lessons and shows patience.

Slave: Begrudging repentance. Admitting failure is destructive of one’s very basis for living (that being a sense of moral adequacy). So repentance is galling, last resort.

Child: Admitting failure is the basis of a Christian’s self-image as adopted child. Repentance reminds anew of magnitude of his love. Repentance quick, willing.

1. List two or three of your significant besetting sins — character flaws, attitudes, self-control problems.

2. How do they stem from a failure to grasp that you are an adopted child of God? (Put another way:) how are they fed and motivated by a desire to justify yourself instead of accepting Christ's free righteousness?

[Note: ask yourself, "What do I feel I have to have for a sense of self-worth and self-acceptance. e.g. If you are angry, what goal is being blocked? If you are anxious what goal is being blocked? How do those goals substitute for the Father's free love? Etc.]

3. Have you "turned" the corner from the slave-mentality to living as a son or daughter of God? Most believers do not start out the Christian life in this understanding, but have to come into it. Have you? Pray if you have not moved along these lines:

"Lord, show me the difference between self-justification and real faith. Help me to see the false trusts that keep me feeling like a hired servant with you? Let the cross and your Fatherly love become a living daily reality in my life. Amen."

C. Walking daily as children of God

Individual sinful acts have sinful motivations. When we ask why we are moved to particular sins, we discover that our sins come because we still seek to find our "justification" (our identity, our sense of worthiness) in other things. Thus, to remember that we are completely loved and righteous in Christ undermines and saps our motives and desires for sin.

Normal activity: Going out of your way to help with a project	
Slave motivation	Sonship motivation
"Do this because, if you succeed, you will know you are not a bum!"	"Do this because Christ sacrificed for me."
"Do this because then somebody will love you, and you are nobody till somebody does."	"Do this because it will please both my Father and the person I am helping."
Results	
If no gratitude is expressed — anger.	If no gratitude expressed — disappointment, but gratitude is not the motive
Even if gratitude is expressed a sense of being owed — controlling.	If gratitude is expressed — new, non-controlling relationship possible
If life goes badly, increased self-pity and bitterness toward God — "after all, look how good I am to people! How could God treat me like this?"	If life goes badly, trust. "After all, I have already been given more than I deserve. And besides, my Father must have some loving purpose"

How to engage in "normal activities" as a child of God

- Recognize that ordinarily both motives are present. (But your fear, pride, anxiety, hurt feelings, anger will be a good indicator of a high level of 'works' motivation present.) There is no way for motives to be totally pure. The goal is to continually refine them.
- As you do "normal activities," identify the motives of the sin-nature (the "under the law" nature). Repent of them. eg. "Father, I see how much I do this out of a hungry desire to steal self-acceptance from the applause of others. That trivializes your unwavering love for me in Christ. Forgive and cleanse me from these motives, which rise from the habits of my old life."
- Now articulate the motives of the Spirit-nature. Say them to yourself as you proceed through the activity. Constantly reinforce "adopted-child" motives. eg. "Father, I do this for you, not for the success it might bring me. I don't need that, nor am I worried that much about failure, for your recognition is all I need. Oh let my heart

feel totally what I just said to you!" [Keep up daily devotions, looking for ideas and verses in the Bible that the Spirit makes "radioactive" to you — truths about our standing in Christ that he makes vivid and engaging to your heart. Then use those radioactive verses on yourself as part of articulating adopted child motives.]

1. List a project or activity or event to which often is attached anxiety or fear or displeasure or anger.

2. Write in what goes on in your heart, and what should go on in your heart:

Slave motivation

Sonship motivation

Romans

God's sovereignty

Study 16 | Romans 9:1-29

Summary

9:1-5 Why does not *all* Israel believe when the message should be clearest to them?

vv.1-3 Paul's anguish over his Israel

vv.4-5 Israel's eight great privileges

9:6-13 NOT because God's promises have failed.

v.6 Not all racial Israel is true Israel

vv.7-9 The example of Isaac and Ishmael

vv.10-13 The example of Jacob and Esau

9:14-18 NOT because God is unfair in his granting mercy

vv.14-16 God only has mercy on some, and that is not inconsistent (example: Moses)

vv.17-18 God sends judgment on some, and that is not inconstant (example: Pharaoh)

9:19-29 NOT because God is unfair in holding us accountable

vv.20-21 God has rights of ownership over us

vv.22-23 God could reject all, but he doesn't!

vv.24-29 The Old Testament predicted all this

9:30-33- BUT because Israel rejected the way of salvation by faith alone

1. vv.1-5 Why would Paul think about the unbelief of the majority of Israel after chapter 8?

Many people see almost no relationship between chapters 9-11 and the previous 8 at all. They see that Paul had several goals for the letter. First, he wanted to send them a general tract on how we are saved through Jesus Christ. Second, he wanted to address the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians within the church. So, having finished his treatise on salvation, he now turns to a totally new subject. That of course, may be the case! But there is another (probably better) explanation.

Romans 8 ends in a tremendous crescendo of confidence. The subject was that God *guarantees* our final perseverance, because our salvation is not based on our will and strength. Rather he has called us and opened our minds to the truth, and now he carries us on to final glory. "Those he predestined, he also called, those he called, he also justified, those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:30) But Paul now can imagine someone coming and saying — "Hold on, Paul! You say that when God calls someone

he always 'brings them all the way home'. But what about the Jews? God called them and went to them but most of the Jews have rejected Christ at the present time. So maybe God's calling and purpose *can* be rejected!"

So Paul is here dealing with a subject not only of intellectual importance but of great emotional importance to him as well. If God promised to Israel that they would be his people, yet the majority did not believe in Christ, does that mean God's promise, power, or mercy is failing? Thus Paul tackles this question in chapters 9-11

2. vv.4-5 What are each of the benefits enjoyed by Israel (vv.4-5) and how does each prepare us and point toward Christ?

Note: Obviously, the answer to this question takes an acquaintance with the rest of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. If your group can do it, ask the question and let them pool their knowledge. If you have a good amount of time, you can give out Old Testament passages and do some cross-referencing to other parts of the Bible. On the other hand, you as the leader could look up the following texts and be prepared to give a lot of explanation in a mini-lecture of about 5 minutes.

"The adoption as sons" refers to Exodus 4:22 and other places where Israel is called God's 'son'. This should have prepared Israel for Jesus teaching that, through him, we can approach God on intimate terms such as "abba."

"The divine glory" refers to God's visible glory cloud — called the '*shekinah*' — the manifestation of his presence, dwelling in their midst in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 29:42ff; I Kings 8:10ff). Jesus is a greater manifestation of God's presence. John 1:14 – "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory."

"The covenants" refers to God's making a relationship with the people through Abraham (Genesis 15), Moses (Exodus 24:8), David (2 Sam.23:5). In each case God creates a relationship with them and promises to bless. In all the cases, however, he tells them of a Messiah or future figure to come who will fulfill the agreement. (See Gen.12:1-3; Deut.18:18; 2 Sam.7:16)

"The receiving of the law" refers to God giving the 10 commandments and all of the law by revelation to Israel (Deut.4:7). Paul has told us in Romans 2 that if we truly understand the law, we will see that we cannot merit salvation and will look to God for a provision.

"The temple worship" was a visible order of service. Hebrews 9:1-4 describes it well. It outlined how the people could approach God. There needed to be a blood sacrifice, a washing and preparation for purification, and a priest to go in your behalf. All these ordinances showed that we could not just approach God in any manner — we needed blood to atone for sin, and a priest-substitute. Jesus is our sacrifice, our priest, our purity, our bread, etc. (Heb.8:1-5)

"The promises" refers to the numerous Old Testament prophecies and promises about the coming of a Messiah. Notice Gen.3:14-21; Gen.49:10; Psalm 2:2-7; Ps.16:9,10; Ps.22; Is.7:14, 9:6,7; Is.52:13ff. Micah 5:2

"The patriarchs" probably means not just Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also such as Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David. Now, all nations have great leaders, but Paul seems to be pointing out that God spoke to Israel through these men. Virtually all of them predicted and foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah.

"From them is traced the human ancestry of Christ." This is obvious but often overlooked. Jesus was Jewish. For the Son of God to become human, he had to become *some* race and culture. By becoming a Jew, God was giving the Jews not only a great honor, but making it 'easier' for them to relate to the Son of God than anyone else.

3. vv.6-13 How does Paul account for Jewish unbelief and still defend the 'word' (promises) of God (v.6)? How does he illustrate and prove his answer from the Old Testament?

We've seen how God had given these promises and covenants through the "patriarchs" and prophets to Israel. For example, God told Abraham that he would bless his "descendants" (Gen.12:1-3). But now Paul makes an important distinction. Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. In other words, he says, "We must define 'Israel' properly! Some who are racially descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not true Israel, and others who are not physically descended from them *are*." Paul has said this before in Romans 4:12.

Then he turns to two Old Testament examples. He says, "Look at the promises of God carefully." God promised Abraham that his descendants would be blessed, his "people," but Abraham had two sons — Isaac and Ishmael. Yet only one was accepted by God. Ishmael was Abraham's physical descendant, but not his spiritual descendant. Thus Paul says, only Isaac was a "child of promise" (v.8). Only he inherits the promise. Paul then shows the principle again with Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. Though both were *physical* descendants of Abraham, only one became a *spiritual* descendant and inherited the promises.

4. vv.10-13 Why does Paul say it was Jacob that became a child who inherited the promises to Abraham, but Esau did not?

When Paul deals with the case of Jacob and Esau, he goes deeper than in his treatment of Isaac and Ishmael. He tackles the very thorny question: "why is it that some of Abraham's descendants love God and are true Israel and others do not?" [Note: of course, Paul's answer will be shedding light on why anyone loves God or does not!]

Paul's answer is hard to avoid or miss:

- a. First, the difference in Esau and Jacob was God's "purpose in election" (v.11). The Greek word for election is *ekloge*, which means to pull out or choose.
- b. Second, that choice of God is made prior to birth, "before the twins were born..."
- c. Third, that choice of God is not based on our performance in any way — "before the

twins...had done anything good or bad" (v.11). Some people counter that perhaps it means God "foresees" who is going to accept and who is going to reject God's way, but v.12 reinforces by saying, "not by works, but by him who calls..."

For good measure, Paul says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" v.13. We must be careful here not to think of this hatred as identical to the emotion we ordinarily call by that name. There is a Hebrew idiom behind this. Jesus told his disciples that they had to "hate" their families and follow him (Luke 14:26). That does not mean to literally hate our parents, but to prefer Jesus over them. Nevertheless, Paul is saying that God chose to put Jacob above Esau, not because of anything about Jacob that was morally superior to Esau. The only reason that Jacob received the promise was because of God's gracious choice.

[Note: Paul's answer has given people difficulties for centuries. These difficulties and issues will be looked at in more detail when we get to Teaching F — Does God Control Everything? Teaching F is discussed after Studies 16-18 cover Romans 9-11. Nevertheless here are a couple of thoughts for dealing with common objections and problems that arise:

1. "Does this mean that God is arbitrary? Does God choose people, in a sense, by saying, "eeny, meeny, miney, moe?"

– No. Paul is not saying that God has no reasons. All we are told is that the reasons are *not in us*. There is no superiority of believers over unbelievers.

2. "Why do we have to insist on the doctrine of election? It causes so many problems."

– Yes, "election" causes many difficulties. But the best reason for accepting the doctrine is that every alternative creates even *more* problems and difficulties. The first is this: without "election" you compromise the central teaching of the Bible, that we are saved by grace alone, not our works. *If the difference between the unbeliever and the believer is ultimately in us (a greater humility, a greater openness, etc.) then we are the real authors of our salvation).*

Many mysteries surround the doctrine of election... but we need to remember two truths. First, election is not just a Pauline doctrine; it was also taught by Jesus himself. 'I know those I have chosen.' (John 13:18; cf.15:16;17:6) Secondly, election is an indispensable foundation of Christian worship, in time and eternity... If we were responsible for our own salvation, either in whole or in part, we would be justified in singing our own praises... But such a thing is inconceivable... Why? Because our salvation is due entirely to his grace, will, initiative, wisdom, and power.

– John Stott, *Romans*

Guiding question: Now summarize how Paul so far has answered the question: "If God is true to his promises, why are so many Jews unbelievers?"

As we look back now on questions #3 and #4, we see that Paul has given a comprehensive (yet troubling!) answer to the question.

1. First, he reminds us that the promises of God given in the Old Testament were never given automatically to anyone who was physically descended from the patriarchs. There is a spiritual faith that is necessary to inherit the promises to Israel.
2. Second, he asserts that the spiritual faith that inherits the promises is ultimately a function of God's choice. God has not chosen all of racial Israel.

It should be noted that this is Paul's answer "so far." When we get to Romans 11 Paul says that the current unbelief of Israel is not permanent, that there will be a large-scale turning of Jews to Christianity in the future. We cannot discuss that until Study 18.

5. vv.14-16 How does Paul in these 3 verses refute the charge that God is unfair to choose some and reject others?

Paul clearly has taught this material before. He has just stated that when people don't believe, it is because God has not chosen them. Immediately he says, "What then shall we say, that God is unjust?" (v.14) He writes that question, of course, because he knows that is always the first reaction of everyone who hears this teaching! It is normal to ask: "To choose only some and not all — that is not fair!" But Paul counters, "*Not at all!*"

Here in vv.14-16 he reminds us that God had mercy upon Moses. Why? "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." At first that sounds almost like the words of an arbitrary bully, until we reflect. Mercy, by its very definition cannot ever be an obligation. To say, something is "unfair" is to say that *it is owed*. But a mercy is *undeserved*, and thus is totally free. See Paul's argument? To say, "It is unfair for God to only have mercy on some," is a self-contradictory statement. Paul is reasoning: "Are you saying that God owes *anyone* salvation? Of course not! But if he owes no one salvation, then he is free to give it to a) all, b) some, or c) none." John Stott says:

"Paul's way of defending God's justice is to proclaim his mercy. It sounds like a complete non sequitur. But it is not. It simply indicates that the question itself is misconceived, because the basis on which God deals savingly with sinners is not justice, but mercy. For salvation "does not... depend on man's desire or effort" that is, on anything we want or strive for, "but on God's mercy" (16).

As an example, remember the rich person who decided to choose 20 inner city kids to guarantee their full college tuition. The analogy is not perfect — we know that this man screened people for families who were better prospects than others. But the point is, there were literally thousands of equally worthy recipients. We also know that the rich man could have helped a lot more than 20. But did anyone say that, since he helped some, he was being unfair to everyone else? No. He had no particular obligation to help any of the children. Since all he gave was sheer mercy, there could be no talk about being "unfair."

"[Paul is saying]: 'If you want to bring in the notion of justice, very well — you will get your wages, you will get what you deserve, and the wages of sin is death! If

God's [salvation were totally] a matter of justice and righteousness, all would be damned; nobody has any claim upon God's mercy.' The fact that anybody has ever received mercy is entirely because of the character and nature of God. The real mystery is not that everybody is not saved, but that anybody is saved — that is the mystery! God owes nothing to anybody..."

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

6. vv.17-23 What does it mean that God 'hardens'? How does Paul then in verses 19-22 refute the charge that God is unfair to choose some and reject others?

These verses are pretty difficult, but they make sense after some reflection.

In vv.17-18 Paul recalls the hardening of Pharaoh's heart against Moses and Israel. Thus Paul uses Pharaoh as a case study of how God's sovereignty relates to human responsibility. If we go back to Exodus 4-14 and read, we see a fascinating picture. On the one hand, the Bible tells us that *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart. "I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go." (Exod 4:21. See also 7:3; 10:1, etc.). God says that he hardened Pharaoh's heart to fulfill his plan (11:9) But on the other hand, we are told that "Pharaoh hardened his heart" (Exod 8:15. See also 8:19; 9:7,17,27 etc.) And God tells Pharaoh that he is being punished because he hardened himself (See 9:13-18).

What is the Bible saying about hardening? Some think that Pharaoh was a fine fellow, but God came and turned his heart hard and cold. But that is not a fair interpretation. If we look at Exodus itself, there are as many statements about *Pharaoh* hardening his heart as that God hardened his heart. Somehow, both are true. But in addition, Paul has already spoken to this in Romans 1:24. He has said that our hearts are full of lusts, and "therefore God gave them up to their desires." So Paul already has spoken to this. *God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was a "giving him up" to his own stubbornness.* When God hardens someone, he doesn't create the hardness, but he simply allows them to go their own way.

"The world fell into sin, but God put a limit, a restraint upon it, and this world would be complete chaos and hell if He did not do so. But the moment He draws back his restraining influence [at any point] there is hardening [there]... The withdrawal of the sun produces hardening ground. So that is one of the ways God produces hardening — he leaves them to themselves..."

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones

Next Paul makes a further case for why God is not unfair. To have mercy on some and to pass over others.

A. vv.20-21. Here he says that God made us, and that therefore he has *rights of ownership*. All by itself, this would probably be a sufficient answer to the question of "fairness." "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" We are so far below God, that we have neither the wisdom nor the right to question our creator.

B. vv.22-23. Here he says that God is showing the riches of his glory through having mercy on some and passing over others. This is the heart of the mystery! Somehow,

if God had mercy on *all* or condemned *all* we would not see his glory. I don't think Paul is giving us much more than a hint here, but it is a very suggestive hint. For the biggest question is: If God *could* save everyone, why doesn't he? And here Paul says that God's chosen course (to save some and leave others) will in the end be more fit to show forth God's glory than any other scheme we can imagine.

- C. vv.22-23. Here Paul also says that "while God is the author of our salvation, we are the authors of our damnation." Notice the important differences between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy. (1) God "bore with great patience the objects of his wrath." This shows that evil people are not *made* evil by God. He bears with them. He never gives anyone quite what they deserve. He is unjust to no one. (2) Notice that the vessels of wrath are prepared for destruction, but it doesn't say by whom. But it says clearly that the vessels of mercy are prepared for glory by he, God. By implication, the vessels of wrath are prepared for destruction by themselves (remember Romans 1:24).

In summary, in election, God comes in and softens our hearts and makes us good, but in hardening, God simply passes over and lets people have the way they have chosen.

"If anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This antinomy contains a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve; but it is consistent with Scripture, history, and experience."

– John Stott

7. Leaving behind the many intellectual questions that 'election' raises, what practical, beneficial effects can this doctrine have on the way you live?

1. It is extremely helpful to worship. Nothing can fill you with so much praise and joy as to realize that not one molecule of credit for your salvation belongs to you, but to the Lord. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psalm 115:1) If I can take any of the credit, I can praise myself — but since I can take no credit, God gets all the praise.
2. It is humbling. People who know this doctrine are able to look at others and truly, literally say, "there but for the grace of God go I." Without believing in election, that kind of talk is only relative. When we see people who disbelieve, or who are leading immoral lives, or who are in other ways foolish or wicked, we have a tendency to think that our openness, our moral sense, or willingness to repent is the difference between them and us. But the doctrine of election humbles us. We even get humbled about our humility, for even that is a gift! We now treat everyone with respect and condescend to no one.
3. It makes us hopeful about others. Some think that 'election' makes us less motivated to witness. But not so. Now I know that it is not my eloquence that will win people, nor their open minds. In fact, 'election' means we can treat *anyone*, even the worst cases, with great hope, because God can work with any kind of material. It doesn't matter how noble and "together" we are.
4. It makes us confident. God is truly in charge, and he is committed to me!

Romans

Our responsibility

Study 17 | Romans 9:30-10:21

Summary

9:30-33 What?

Israel rejected salvation through God's righteousness instead of our own

- v.30 The Gentiles, who did not seek righteousness, have obtained it!
- v.31 The Jews, who *did* seek for righteousness, have not obtained it!
- v.32a Why not? Because they pursued an impossible goal: righteousness by works
- vv.32b-33 They were "scandalized"; their pride was offended by Christ and his salvation

10:1-4 Why?

Israel was *ignorant* of salvation by God's righteousness instead of our own

- vv.1-2 The Jews have a zeal for God, but their zeal is misplaced and mistaken
- v.3 They recognized their *need* for righteousness, but tried to create their own
- v.4 Once we grasp the radical nature of Christ's work, it is the end of legalism

10:5-8 -The two ways of righteousness in the Bible

- v.5 Moses (in Leviticus 18:5) tells us that we must obey the entire law to be saved
- vv.6-8 But Moses (in Deut.30:14) tells us we can get a new life through simple belief

10:9-15-How to become righteous God's way

- v.9a 1st need: to confess the work of Christ in history
- v.9b 2nd need: to trust in that work from the heart
- v.10 (Justification and salvation are essentially the same thing)
- vv.11-13 This is accessible to anyone and everyone
- vv.14-15 3rd need: to communicate the message of the good news through human beings

10:16-21 Return to the question: Why did Israel reject God's way of righteousness? They were *vincibly ignorant*.

- vv.16-17 Not all Israel has believed, as Isaiah foretold
- v.18 Did they not *hear* the message? Of course they did
- vv.19-20 Did they not understand the message? The Jews knew about the need for righteousness but the Gentiles did not
- v.21 The reason is stubbornness of heart

1. 9:30-33 What does Paul say is the reason for Jewish unbelief? Does this contradict what Paul says in 9:14-18? If not, why not and how not?

Romans 9:1-29 and 9:30-10:21 must be kept closely together. The two sections at first seem contradictory, because up until 9:29, Paul is attributing unbelief of most Jews to God's sovereign purpose, but from 9:30 through chapter 10, he ascribes their unbelief to their own blindness and arrogance.

Why not?

Now we can, of course, assume that this is a contradiction, but that does not give Paul much credit. Even if we do not believe in the inspiration of the Bible, we must conclude that Paul was a superior intellect. After all, he formulated the Christian faith and strategically spread it in such a way that it conquered the Roman empire and became the single greatest religious movement in history. So it is not likely that a man of that caliber would write an ordered treatise on theology and unwittingly contradict himself within one chapter.

How not?

Paul is showing us that God's sovereignty and human responsibility stand in relationship to each other as an "antinomy" — as an apparent contradiction. One famous example of an antinomy is the fact that light sometimes behaves as particles and at other times as waves. We don't understand fully how that could be — it is an *apparent* contradiction of physics. But we expect to understand it in the future as we get more information. So here. The Bible never says: "This event happened totally in accord with God's plan *therefore* the human beings were not responsible for their actions." Nor does it say, "the human beings were responsible for their actions *therefore* the event was not certain to happen according to God's plan." No. Rather, the Bible holds both of these truths together: 1) the complete sovereignty of God over all history; and 2) the complete responsibility of every human being for his or her behavior.

The following quote does not explain all of the "antinomy," but it helps us see how God can save people through election, and yet people who disbelieve are still responsible for their behavior.

In [Romans 9] verses 6 to 29, Paul explains why anybody is saved — it is the sovereign election of God. In these verses [30-33] he is showing us why anybody is lost, and the explanation of that is their own responsibility... So this is what the Bible teaches. Election alone accounts for the saved, but non-election does not account for the lost... No one would be saved were it not that God in a sovereign manner has chosen him, as we have seen abundantly from verses 6 to 29. It is God's action alone that saves someone. So why is anybody lost? Is it because they are not elected? *No!* What accounts for the lost is their rejection of the gospel... We are not responsible for our acceptance of the gospel, but we are responsible for our rejection of it.

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones *Romans* 9:1-33

2. 9:30-33 What is completely ‘topsy-turvy’ about the situation Paul describes in how Jew and Gentile responded to the gospel? Why do you think that people more concerned about religion and righteousness might be more prone to miss the gospel?

The situation Paul has been describing all along is that a growing majority of the church was Gentile. In general, the Gentiles were more responsive to the gospel than the Jews.

The topsy-turviness of the situation is depicted by Paul in his striking statement of vv.30-31. “The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it” (v.30a). This is something of an understatement! The pagans (described in Romans 1:18ff) first of all did not have a full picture of righteousness as did the Jews who had the full law of God. The Gentiles had a basic outline in their consciences (Romans 2). But they did not follow their consciences — rather they pursued selfishness and pleasure. This is also true of modern “pagans.” But ironically, the Gentiles who lived such wicked lives were more open to the gospel, “the righteousness that is by faith” (v.30b). On the other hand, “Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it” (v.31a). The Jews had a deep awareness that they needed righteousness to go before God, while the Gentiles had no such developed understanding. Yet the Jews pursuit of righteousness was “by works” (v.31b). Because they sought to create their own righteousness as a way of standing before God, they stumbled over the concept that God’s righteousness has to come as a gift through Jesus Christ.

The topsy-turvy irony can be put in several ways. a) The ones who knew the most about God did not come to *know* God, while the ones who knew the least *about* God came to *know* God the best. b) The ones who most wanted to be righteous end up dead in their sins, while the ones who least wanted to be righteous end up holy and blameless in his sight.

It is not that difficult to understand what happened to the Jews and the Gentiles if we think about the different ways that “religious/moral” people and “irreligious/pagans” respond to the gospel even today. Modern pagans trample the gospel underfoot, especially when they are young, but as time goes on they come to recognize their own sin. Many come to feel their own spiritual emptiness quite poignantly. But religious people are much less honest with themselves about their sin, and generally have a smugness, a condescending attitude toward others, and a feeling that, “I try hard so God owes me.” Religious people are either: a) offended by the gospel (“You mean you could be a criminal and believe in Jesus and be saved? — that’s too easy!”); or else b) they run the gospel through their own works-righteousness grid and reinterpret it to fit in. Thus they think they have already heard the gospel.

This may seem to be the most elemental concept in the Protestant tradition but is just as rare an act of faith among Protestants as among Catholics. We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification... We start each day with our personal security resting not on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in [religion]. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved to... a self-righteousness which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace.

– Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*

3. 10:1-8 What does Paul give Israel credit for (v.2a)? What does he say is the reason they did not submit to the gospel (vv.2b-3)? Why blame them, then? How does Paul show that they should have known the gospel?

Paul gives Israel credit that they are *zealous for God*. This is of course something that Paul knew first hand. He himself, as a Jew, was extremely zealous to please and honor and serve God. They were willing to go to any lengths to obey him. Paul then is giving “credit where credit is due,” and granting how good it is for Israel to feel so keenly the importance of the honor of God.

But Paul says that the reason for Israel’s going astray is that *zeal* is not enough; the zeal must *be based on knowledge*. This is a complete contradiction of a common proverb of our time — “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.” Well, says Paul, the Jews were sincere and zealous in their beliefs, but their beliefs were erroneous and mistaken! If we think about it, zeal without knowledge or understanding is fanaticism, terrorism. Imagine a lady who loves her neighbor and sincerely brings her a big bouquet of flowers, but her neighbor is desperately allergic to them. That is zeal without knowledge, and it could even be fatal. Imagine a person who intensely believes that a poison solution is not fatal — but if she drinks it, she will be dead. Her zeal not only did not help her, it helped her die.

Why blame them then, if their problem was ignorance? Looking closely, we see that Paul says: “since they did not *know* the righteousness from God... they did not submit to [it]” (v.3). We see that the ignorance is “vincible” ignorance. There is a sincere zeal at its base, but they stay ignorant not because the information is unavailable, but because it suits them. Fanatics are people who have zeal and sincerity (they are often willing to die for their cause), but it is a zeal that refuses reflection — they refuse to stop and think things through. Though they are sincere, they can also do a lot of damage. When they do, we hold them responsible because they should have known better.

One of the ways Paul shows that their ignorance was “vincible” is references to the Old Testament. He quotes Moses twice to show that though Moses could be read as teaching moralism, he did know that law-keeping was not enough. First, Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 where Moses says about the law, “the man who does these things will *live* because of them.” Now on the surface of it, that seems to mean that Moses was teaching the possibility of getting salvation (“life”) through law-keeping. Actually, all Moses was saying was — *if* you could obey the law perfectly you would receive eternal life. That of course is true! But that is not the whole picture.

Then Paul goes to Deuteronomy 30. (To understand Paul’s argument, you need to understand the whole of Deut.30:1-14.) Though he only quotes v.14 from the chapter, he makes allusions to the whole passage. In Deut.30:1-2 Moses alludes to the fact that Israel will stray from God and receive “curses” and punishment. Then in 30:6 he says: “the Lord your God will circumcise your hearts... that you may love him with all your heart and soul *and live*.” Then in 30:11ff. he says, “now what I am telling you is not impossible to do! You don’t have to go to heaven or over the sea to do it!” Paul alludes to this in Romans 10:6-7 without quoting Moses directly. Then he quotes Moses’ 30:14

"[My] word is very near you... in your mouth and heart." What is Paul saying? By pointing to Deut.30, he shows that Moses knew something more than law-keeping was required. They needed a new heart ("circumcise your hearts") which would lead to loving God and "life." Then Moses says in effect: "To receive this word does not take incredible feats. It is something you do in your mouth and heart." Paul picks up on that and says: "See! Moses knew that it was *faith* from the heart that would bring you home. You don't need to scale heaven (for Christ already came down from it) or die (for Christ has already done that). You need to believe!"

4. 10:4 In what specific way is Christ the end of the law? Therefore, in what way(s) is Christ not the end of the law? (Draw on what you have learned previously in Romans).

When Paul says that Christ is the "end of the law," he is putting in startling terms what he has taught in the earlier chapters of the letter. It is a direct confrontation to legalistic moralists and religious people (those are the types he is talking about in this chapter).

Paul does not here say that the very *category* of the law is ended, or that the binding nature of the law is ended. Rather, Christ ended the law as a *way of righteousness*, as a way to be acceptable to God. How do we know that that is the way he is using the word "righteousness" here? When Paul talks of the righteousness that comes to those who believe (as he does in the last part of v.4), he is referring not to general morality, but the state of "rightness with God" that means you have favor with him. Thus Paul is saying: "Christ's work shows that the law as a way of righteousness is ended *so that* faith may be seen as the way of righteousness."

From Romans 6:1-8:4 we know that what is ended for the Christian is being "under the law" as a system of salvation. What is *not* ended is our obligation to obey the law as a way to please and express our gratitude to the one who has saved us by grace.

5. 10:9-13 What do these verses tell us about how to become a Christian?

First, the truth must be known, there must be a basic body of *content* put before us. You cannot be saved by believing in believing! That content is seen as consisting of:

a) *Jesus' Person*. "Jesus is Lord" is a reference to all we know about Jesus' divine identity. The Greek word Paul uses for "Lord" is *kurios*. In the Greek Old Testament, the word *kurios* was the translation for God's personal name "Yahweh." So to call Jesus *kurios* was not only a claim of his deity, but it was a claim that he was supreme authority over the world (for the Caesar's also claimed the title *kurios*, or supreme ruler).

b) *Jesus' Work*. "God raised him from the dead." We must believe he was raised from the dead, and thus that he died. In other words, we must believe in Christ's life, death, and resurrection for our sins.

One hymn writer put it:

Upon a life I did not live,
 Upon a death I did not die.
 Another's life, another's death
 On this I stake my whole eternity.

Second, the truth must be believed from the heart. This means not that the whole heart must be purified perfectly. In the context of the rest of Romans 10, we can see what “believe” means. The heart is a token of the whole self. Thus we are to trust our whole self to the person and work of Christ as our righteousness. We are to “transfer” our trust from our own efforts to be righteous, to Christ’s righteousness on our behalf. That is the faith that saves — not merely a general belief that Christ lived or in his teaching. We must trust in his work (his death and resurrection) for us.

The fact that we are to confess with the mouth must not be seen as a separate action from believing from the heart.

“The parallelism is reminiscent of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament, and the two clauses are to be held together rather than separately. Thus, there is no substantive difference between being ‘justified’ and being ‘saved’. Similarly, the content of the belief and that of the confession need to be merged.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

In other words, to “confess with the mouth” is simply part of “believing with the heart.” They both mean to “profess” faith in Christ. Anyone who does believe expresses this belief. If we misunderstand the Hebrew literary device of “parallelism,” we might think Paul was saying that we have two separate things to do, first to confess verbally that Jesus is Lord and secondly to believe internally that Jesus is raised. But that would contradict the rest of Romans, for that would be to require a kind of “work” to be saved — a public profession of some “magic words.”

Third, we learn from verses 11-13 that becoming a Christian is equally possible and available to anyone (v.11) and to everyone (v.12) because there is no difference between Jew and Gentile with regard to need.

6. 10:14-17 What do these verses tell us about evangelism? How are faith and hearing the word related in your own life?

There are four verbs that tell us how evangelism works.

“Sent” v.15 means that messengers must be sent. The Greek word *apostello* (“sent”) probably means Paul is thinking about the apostles themselves. So we see that the first step in evangelism is that Christ sent us authoritative witnesses and teachers, whose message is in the Bible. Probably “sent” also refers to how Christ through his church sends out missionaries, preachers, and lay people to be messengers of that apostolic word.

“Preach” v.14c is the word *kerysso*, which was meant to be a “herald” or to make announcements. A herald was in a sense a living newspaper — heralds were a major means of transmitting news in the marketplace and city streets. So the word “preach” does not refer only to what today are called “sermons.” Heralds operated in the streets.

“Heard” v.14b. Paul probably has more in mind than mere exposure. This means that saving faith cannot happen mystically, but has to occur in response to the content really

penetrating the understanding. For example, just to read the Bible does not save — it is not a process of magic. The message of the Bible needs to really be *heard*, understood. A person cannot believe unless the message is given a hearing.

“Believe” v.13. This is what makes us Christians.

So what Paul is teaching about evangelism is:

- A. It is absolutely necessary: “How can they believe without someone preaching to them” v.15.
- B. It requires a willingness to speak out (preach).
- C. It requires not just proclamation but persuasion, getting a person’s understanding (hear).
- D. It requires the transmission of a body of truth that is not a person’s opinion but the authoritative revelation from Christ and his apostles.

All Christians experience their need for more faith than they have. Our faith is not only born of an understanding of the word of God (Scripture) when we are converted, but it continues to grow only to the degree that we grow in hearing the Word. The deeper our understanding of the Word, and the more often we “hear” it, the greater our faith.

7. 10:18-21 Summarize the steps in Paul’s final case for why Israel is inexcusable?

First question: Didn’t they hear the gospel? (v.18)

Answer: *Of course they did* (v.18) Paul quotes Psalm 19, which is a bit surprising, for it speaks of how God’s creation (the mountains, the heavens) declare the glory of God all over the world. Paul probably meant that the spread of the gospel was as widespread as that. Before anyone objects that the gospel even now has not reached every part of the world— realize Paul is thinking of the Jews. Wherever a Jewish community existed, the gospel had been preached.

Second question: Well, didn’t they understand it? (v.19)

Answer: By asking this question, Paul is showing that it is possible to be exposed to the gospel and not really understand it. But he answers that they *did* understand. He quotes Deut.32:21 to show that it is only the Gentiles that had not understanding. They did not know the nature of God (his holiness) or the need for righteousness, or the promises of forgiveness by substitution implicit in the tabernacle and temple worship, or all the promises about a Messiah, nor especially the fact that the Lord could become Our Righteousness for us (Jer.23:5). The Gentiles, thus, did not understand the ways of God, not the Jews. Deut.32:21 shows that God in a sense “shows them up” with the Gentiles, making them “envious” of them.

3rd question (implicit): Then why didn't they believe.?

Answer: First, Paul says that the Gentiles had found God, though they did not seek him (v.20), and second, he quotes Isaiah about how God has held out his hands to Israel but they did not respond because of obstinacy (v.21). This is an amazing indictment. He didn't "hold out his hands" to the Gentiles like he did to the Jews. He did not give the Gentiles anything approaching what he gave to the Jews. Yet they have responded better than the Jews. Thus Israel is not to be excused for their refusal.

Romans

God and Israel

Study 18 | Romans 11:1-36

Summary

v. 11:1a: Question #1: Did God reject Israel? NO!

11:1b-10 – Israel’s unbelief is not total:

God has not rejected Israel, but the majority are hard toward the gospel.

- v.1b Paul is a believer and a Jew.
- v.2a God foreknew a people from eternity.
- vv.2b-3 Elijah also mistakenly thought there were no believers left in Israel
- v.4 But there were many!
- v.5 So today there are many Jewish believers
- v.6 Who are chosen by sheer grace.
- v.7 Though Israel as a totality did not find the righteousness of God, the elect did
- vv.8-10 The Old Testament describes the hardness God gave to those who had rejected him.

vv. 11:11a – Question #2: Did they fall beyond recovery? NO!

11:11b-32 – Israel’s unbelief is not *final*.

The hardening on the majority is temporary; in the future this will change.

vv.11-16: Three Stages of Blessing

Stage A [v.11] Israel’s difficulties with the gospel led to the salvation of Gentiles.

Stage C [v.12] Eventually, Israel’s full belief will bring greater blessing to the world.

Stage B [vv.13-14] Through the success of the gospel to Gentiles, Israel will be won.

- v.15 If Israel’s unbelief has had this benefit, imagine the benefit of their belief.
- v.16 Since God has brought some of Israel in, we can look to him to bring the whole in.

vv.17-24: The Olive Tree

- v.17 Gentiles are like a wild branch that has been grafted into a tree. They benefit from the Biblical religion of Israel
- vv.18-22 So (Gentiles) don’t be arrogant! The Jews who disbelieved were broken off, and so will you if you disbelieve

vv.22-24 And (Jews) don't be discouraged! Anyone who believes can be grafted back

vv.25-32: The Mystery

vv.25-26 Recap of the three stages of blessing.

vv.28-29 Currently most of Israel rejects the gospel, and they are under his judgment, but God remembers his promises to their forefathers.

vv.30-31 Recap of the three stages of blessing.

v.32 Though both Jews and Gentiles deserve damnation, so both Jews and Gentiles will receive mercy.

vv. 11:33-36: Doxology!

v.33 God's wisdom (seen in the doctrines of free justification and election) is an infinite depth of richness

vv.34-35 It puts us in a state of complete dependence upon him, for both knowledge and grace

v.36 God is creator, sustainer, and heir of all things.

1. vv.1-6 What are the three or four bits of evidence that Paul gives to prove that God has not rejected the Jews?

In verse 1 Paul poses again the question, "Has God rejected Israel?" — meaning ethnic Israel. After all of the promises God made to Abraham and David, etc., how could he be abandoning them? Why doesn't he turn their hearts to him? Has he utterly abandoned them? That is the question.

Paul immediately answers the question with a big "NO!" Paul's main argument in these verses is that *"God has not rejected Israel, for Israel's unbelief is not **total**."*

Paul then gives four arguments to demonstrate this:

1. v.1b **"Paul" argument.** Paul points out that he himself, the major missionary of the early church, is a Jew. He is saying, "Look at me! I am a Jew, and I was a very blasphemous and hardened person. How can we say that God has given up on the Jews when he didn't give up on me! And he took me and is using me mightily in his work."
2. v.2 **"Election" argument.** In chapter 9 we saw that to foreknow is more than to "foresee." Paul is saying that God is determined (foreordained) to bring Jews to faith in him. Those he has foreknown can't fail to believe.
3. v.3 **"Elijah" argument.** There was another man who thought that God had abandoned Israel and that there was no one who believed apart from him. But God contradicted Elijah's perception, telling him that there were thousands who believed. In other words, there has always been in Israel a "faithful remnant," the spiritual Israel within Israel.

4. v.4 **"Grace" argument.** Paul says, "So too at the present time," to show that, like Elijah, we are mistaken to think all Israel has been rejected. No, says Paul, "There is a remnant chosen by grace... no longer by works." Paul means this — what guarantees that there will always be a faithful remnant is *not* that there is always a set of good decent people who will believe, but rather that there is always the grace of God. It is *God* who preserves a remnant. Those who believe do so sheerly because of his grace.

Another way to look at this is that Paul is only using one argument and giving two illustrations. His argument is "election-grace": "God has chosen a faithful remnant by his sheer grace." Then his two illustrations are himself and the mistake of Elijah.

2. vv.7-10 How does the word 'retribution' in v.9 answer the person who says 'It is unfair of God to harden a person's heart and mind toward the gospel! They never had a chance!' (Refer to similar verses in chapter 9 or 10)?

Verse 7 says, "What Israel (meaning Israel as a whole or majority) sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect (meaning Israel's believing minority). The others were hardened." It is in 10:3 that Paul tells us what it was that Israel "sought" — righteousness. However, they sought it by establishing their own, rather than receiving it as a gift from God through Christ. (10:3-4)

Here then seems to be the order: *First*, Israel sought the righteousness of God, but when confronted with the choice of getting it by "works" or "gift," the majority sought it through the former and the "elect" through the gift. *Then* the majority was hardened. I think it is fair to paraphrase Paul in v.7 like this:

"Israel sought the righteousness of God earnestly, but wrongly, except for the elect. As a result, the majority were hardened."

Therefore the hardening we have here is a "judicial" hardening — a punishment for having a proud heart which rejects the message of grace. Thus in vv.9-10 (quoting from Psalm 69) we see that the "*darkening*" of their eyes is a retribution! A *retribution* is a punishment that exactly fits the crime. Hardening is thus a most fitting punishment for a proud spirit. Pride and self-centeredness leads to a hardness and love-lessness. Though God executes it, it is a natural consequence!

3. v.7 How is it possible to so want to please God that you reject his love for you? Have you seen this happen?

We must remember as well that "hardening" does not necessarily mean bitterness, wrath and hostility toward Christianity per se. It does not necessarily mean *harshness*. A hardened person is someone who is completely obtuse to the gospel of free justification and adoption.

Verse 7 thus gives us a picture of a dynamic that can happen today. The amazing concept is this — a person can be trying so desperately (earnestly) hard to please and serve God that he or she comes to vigorously resist the idea of grace. How? Well, you could very easily conclude that God is holy and majestic, and that he cannot abide evil in any way. Therefore, you conclude you must cleanse and purify your heart to approach

him. You find any concept of “free total acceptance” as dishonoring to a holy God! “Imagine!” says a person with this view. “The idea that a convicted murderer can just say words of repentance and come right in to God like a person who has worked for years to be good! How illogical! How insulting to the righteousness of God!” You can see the gospel as an insult to the greatness of the Lord.

This is a form of spiritual “judo” done on the heart by sin and the devil. (“Judo” uses the enemies forward motion against him.) It is good to seek God’s righteousness, but that eagerness can easily be used to make the gospel seem unworthy of that righteousness. So through a real desire to please God — mixed with an unwitting pride in one’s abilities — the heart becomes deeply allergic and hard toward the mercy and love of God through Christ.

This is the case with many people around the world today. Very sincere Jews and Muslims and Hindus, for example, misguidedly reject the gospel because it seems to weaken the need for moral effort. But inside the church this dynamic is working heavily as well. It can be seen in whole congregations motivated almost completely by fear and guilt and a need for approval.

4. v.11-16 What does Paul mean when he says he seeks to make unbelievers, especially Jewish unbelievers, “envy?” Isn’t that stirring up unworthy motives?

To understand Paul’s statement, we must discern the three stages he sees Israel going through with regard to the gospel of Jesus.

*In the **first stage**, Israel “transgressed” (v.12), but it brought salvation to the Gentiles.*

This is fascinating. Paul means that, though many Jews believed, there was a lot of hostility to Christianity among the majority of Israel. If this had not happened, the early Jewish Christians could have easily concluded that the gospel was only for ethnic Israel. It can be seen in the book of Acts as a repeated cycle: a) The gospel is preached in a synagogue, b) The Jewish community is fractured, with some believing and many becoming hostile. c) As a result the preachers turn also to the Gentiles in town and find many converts there as well. d) Finally the church is multi-ethnic, with both Jew and Gentile. Imagine if in every town, the whole synagogue had been converted — Christianity could have stayed locked in as only a renewal movement inside ethnic Israel. “...their transgression means riches for the world...” (v.12)

*In the **second stage**, the Gentiles make Israel “envious” (v.11).* Paul even goes on to say that it is one of the goals of his ministry to make his own people “envy and save some of them.” Now ordinarily, we use the word “envy” in a pretty negative way. In fact, Luke mentions that the Jews were “envious” of the apostles (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5), meaning that they were jealous of their success and acclaim and growing influence and power. But it cannot be that Paul is thinking about envy in that respect. (For example, in Acts 8 Simon Magus became ‘jealous’ of the apostle’s miracle-working power and asked for it. He was severely condemned by Peter.)

Probably the kind of envy that Paul has in mind is described well by John Stott:

“Not all envy is tainted with selfishness, because it is not always either a grudging discontent or a sinful covetousness. At base, envy is ‘the desire to have for oneself something possessed by another’, and whether envy is good or evil depends on the nature of the something desired and on whether one has any right to its possession. If that something is in itself evil, or it belongs to somebody else and we have no right to it, then the envy is sinful. But if the something desired is in itself good, a blessing from God, which he means all his people to enjoy, then to ‘covet’ it and to ‘envy’ those who have it is not at all unworthy. This kind of desire is right in itself and to arouse it can be a realistic motive in ministry.”

– John R.W.Stott, *Romans*

Here then is a remarkable insight. Just as the Gentiles could only have heard because Israel rejected Christ in great part, now the Jews can only believe because the Gentiles have accepted Christ in great part. In other words, the Jews will see fulfilled in the Gentiles so many of the promises of the Old Testament. A possible example of this is Acts 6:1-6. After the early church sets apart officers (deacons) who care for the needy, we are told (6:7) that then there were a lot of Jewish priests converted to Christ. Why? The priests were supposed to bring the people’s tithes and resources to the poor, but that did not happen very well. Now here are the Christians, under the power of the Holy Spirit, being empowered to generosity and creating a community in which every needy person is cared for. That was what Israel was to be (Deut.15:4-5)! The priests saw it and were “envious” and convicted and listened to the gospel. Paul probably has something like this in mind. *First, the Jews won the Gentiles, but in the second stage, the Gentiles will win the Jews.*

Finally, *Paul speaks of a third stage sometime in the future.* In the second stage, the envy of Israel only wins “some of them.” (v.14) But Paul envisions a time of greater riches (v.12), of acceptance (v.15). What is that? See vv.25-27.

Note: v.16 is a hard verse to interpret. It probably means that the faithful remnant should be seen as just a “first-fruits” of a far greater harvest later.

5. vv.17-24 How does the olive tree metaphor warn the Gentiles? How does it square with what Paul said in 8:28-38 about the certainty of our salvation?

“In exceptional circumstances... it is customary to reinvigorate an olive tree which is ceasing to bear fruit by grafting it with a shoot of the wild-olive, so that the sap of the tree ennoble this wild shoot [but] the tree again begins to bear fruit”

– William Ramsey, *The Expositor* (quoted in Stott)

This approach to horticulture is a great metaphor for Paul. The “wild olive branch” is a dynamic growing thing, but it only is able to draw life and produce because it is grafted into the tree, from which it draws nourishment. Yet on the other hand, the presence of the branch renews the whole tree, kicking on all its systems. The application to the Jews is obvious, but in this passage Paul applies the metaphor specifically to “you Gentiles” (v.13).

The Gentiles are warned not to boast (v.18) — to be humble. They must realize that they are the beneficiaries of the Biblical religion of Israel (see 9:1-5). They have been grafted in to the tree of Israel. They inherit the promises given to Abraham because they have the faith of Abraham (9:6-7). But in all this they come in and stand in the flow of Biblical history and promise that comes through Israel. Thus they must not look down on the Jews, but respect them. “You don’t support the root, the root supports you (v.18).” It is most inappropriate for the Gentiles to be disrespectful of the Jews. We have a Jewish Bible and a Jewish Messiah!

The Gentiles are warned not to be arrogant but to be afraid (v.20). Paul shows that some of the natural branches of the tree have been removed because of unbelief (v.20). He calls us to meditate on “the kindness and sternness of God.” His kindness or sternness rest on you depending on whether you disbelieve or believe.

Now it is normal to wonder how this kind of talk squares with all we have heard from Paul in Romans 8 and 9. He said we are only justified believers because we were chosen by grace (8:30-31; 11:5-6). He said that our salvation is certain, that nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from his love (8:38). So why actually warn us to “be afraid.”

The point is that faith is not presumption. Paul’s whole argument about the Jews throughout Romans is: “Though they were the chosen people, they began to think they were the *choice* people. They became confident that they were ‘in’ no matter how they lived simply because they were Abraham’s physical descendants. That is not the case.” So now Paul says, “Don’t anyone fall into the same presumption!” What he exhorts them to is to continue (v.23). The only way we know that God’s sovereign love is upon us is that we *continue*, that we persevere in seeking to be like Jesus. If that “continuing” disappears, if we start to live for ourselves, live in sin, then we will and should begin to wonder if his kindness is upon us, if we were ever chosen.

We must not pit this kind of “exhortation” Scripture against 8:30 “those he justified he *also* glorified” and the many other passages where Paul insists we are safe in his love. I John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us they would have continued with us.” There is no talk of “losing salvation” here — only of the revelation of counterfeits. Hebrews 3:14 is similar: “We have come to share in his life if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As just has been said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...’”

6. vv. 25-32 What is the ‘mystery’ Paul now reveals?

The great mystery is that “all Israel will be saved” (v.26). A startling verse! What does it mean?

1. **Who?** What does it mean when Paul says “Israel?” Some want to say that it is only the elect remnant of Israel, but that makes this a meaningless statement. (Of course all the elect will be saved!) Besides, in v.25 the word “Israel” clearly means ethnic Israel in contrast with the Gentiles. So this refers to the Jews as a whole body.

2. **What?** What does it mean when Paul says “saved?” The quote that immediately follows in vv.26-27 (from Isaiah and Jeremiah) refer to a “deliverer come from Zion” who will “take away their sins.” This is clearly Jesus. So what Paul is saying is that some time “Israel” as a whole will experience salvation through Jesus Christ. This means that Paul is encouraging most strongly the continued evangelization of Jewish people.

“It is understandable that since the holocaust Jews have demanded an end to Christian missionary activity among them, and that many Christians have felt embarrassed about continuing it. It is even mooted that Jewish evangelism is an unacceptable form of anti-Semitism. So some Christians have attempted to develop... ‘two-covenant theology’...namely that there are two different salvation tracks—the Christian track for the believing remnant and believing Gentiles, and the track for historical Israel that relies on God’s covenant with them... Romans 11 stands in clear opposition to this trend because of its insistence on the fact that there is only one olive tree, to which Jewish and Gentile believers both belong. Jewish people will be grafted in again ‘if they do not persist in unbelief’. [We are to ‘be afraid’ at what unbelief has done to some of them.] So faith in Jesus is essential for them... The two-covenant theology also has the disastrous effect of perpetuating the distinction between Jews and Gentiles which Jesus Christ abolished...’ The irony of this... is that the late 20th century, in order to avoid anti-Semitism, has advocated a position (the non-evangelization of the Jews) which Paul regards precisely as anti-Semitic. It would be quite intolerable to imagine a church at any period which was [either] simply a Gentile phenomenon or consisted only of Jews’.”

– John Stott, Romans

3. **How many?** What does the word “all” mean in v.26. “All Israel” probably does not mean “every Jew without exception” (“‘All Israel’ is a recurring expression in Jewish literature where it need not mean ‘every Jew without exception’ but ‘Israel as a whole’” –F.F.Bruce). It means the great mass of the Jewish people. That is how the word “Israel” is used through the rest of the chapter. He often uses it to refer to the majority of Israel over against the minority of believing Jews. Many people think that this must mean a last minute, large scale mass revival of Christianity among Jews — and that could be the case. But Paul’s language allows for the possibility of a steady but growing flow of Jews into Christianity until we arrive at the place that more or most Jews have come to believe.

Note: v.32 also uses the word “all” and many have thought that Paul is here teaching universal salvation — that eventually God will simply have mercy on all and save all. The rest of Romans cannot allow us to interpret this in such a way. Romans 2:5-8ff tell us clearly that some will receive God’s judgment at the end. Instead, we understand v.32 (along with vv.30-31) as teaching us that God is not showing preference. He uses the Jews to reach the Gentiles and the Gentiles to reach the Jews. God’s mercy is coming to all, “not all people without exception, but all people with out distinction.” (F.F.Bruce).

7. vv.33-36 This is Paul breaking into spontaneous worship! What can we learn about our own worship from this example?

There are many, many more things we can learn that can be put down here. But here are some ideas:

1. On the one hand — **there should be no worship without truth.** Paul is quoting Scripture as he praises God spontaneously. In v.34 he quotes Is.40:13 and in v.35 he quotes Job 41:11. Knowing Scripture intimately makes an enormous difference in both the ignition of praise in the heart and in the expression of praise. Many books teach meditation/spirituality techniques that center on “visualizations” of incidents on one’s past or on phrases or images or even on nothing at all. Worship should not come from meditation in general, but through the meditation of Scripture in particular. The Bible must always be the center of any public or private praise and worship.
2. On the other hand — **there should be no teaching or study of truth without worship.** Paul does not just teach or study doctrinal truth without using it immediately as a basis for the praise of God. He never treats truth as just something to be known or even applied, but as a gateway into praise of God. He uses truth to see God. We are never to study God or the Bible in a detached, cool manner. We must let ourselves be disturbed and comforted and challenged by the truth. We must always allow ourselves to feel its power.
3. **Doctrines that exalt God lead to the greatest joy.** Paul does not find the deepest impulses for praise in looking at human accomplishments. Praise comes to the degree we see our weakness and impotence and complete dependence on him. In other words, the doctrines of God complete sovereignty in salvation is what leads Paul to the greatest joy and praise. We have never given God *anything* — he owes us *nothing*. These are the ideas that bring Paul the most joy in worship.
4. Paul does not even get troubled by the parts of God’s ways that he cannot discern or figure out. “how unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (v.33 – King James Version). Many people feel they cannot bow or worship God unless they can understand everything about him.

TEACHING F

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Does God control everything?

In Romans 8:11 Paul teaches about the sovereignty of God over all the affairs of human history.

A. Everything that happens is under God’s direction.

Romans 8:28 – “We know that, for the ones loving him, God works together all things for good...”

Though this verse only makes reference to the way God controls the circumstances of believer’s lives, Ephesians 1:11 tells us that he also does this for everyone (“him who works all things in accord with his purpose”). In both Eph.1:11 and Romans 8:28 the Greek words are the same. God “performs” (ergon) “all things” (panta) that happen. In Rom.8:28 we are told he directs all things to “work together” (sunergei), meaning that God not only brings his power to bear on every circumstance, but he conforms all events to cohere in his master plan. If we take his repeated statement “all” seriously, it means that:

1. His plan includes “little things.” Ultimately, there are no accidents. Proverbs 16:33 – “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal thereof is from the Lord.” Even the flip of the coin is part of his plan.
2. His plan includes “bad things.” The evil of the world was not God’s original design. Death, disease, sin and decay are a temporary result of sin (Rom.8:18-23). God is distressed by our distress (Is.63:9) and he is grieved by our pain (Lam.3:22). Therefore, he is weaving into his plan even those troubles and sorrows and pain, because his plan, in the end, will result in glory for him and “good” for his people (Rom.8:28). “Not even a sparrow falls to the ground except by my Father’s will” (Matt.10:29). “Whenever evil befalls a city, is it not the Lord who caused it?” (Amos 3:6). “I am the Lord and there is no other... I bring prosperity and create disaster. I the Lord do all these things.” (Is.45:6-7)
3. His plan includes sins. This must be the case, for our sins and the sins of others are a very major part of “all things.” (If our sins were left out of the plan of God, there’d not be much left!) Psalm 76:10 says of God, “You make the wrath of men to praise thee,” meaning that God will overrule and control things so that even wicked and violent events come out for the good of his people and his glory. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph says to his brothers, “You intended me harm, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of lives.” Joseph is explaining that his brothers’ evil action of selling him into slavery was used by God to do great good.

B. YET all choices are free acts for which we are responsible.

Romans 9:16 – “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” Romans 9:31-32 – “Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.”

Many readers find Romans 9 contradictory. In the early part of the chapter, Paul says that many Jews do not believe the gospel because they are not chosen, and God chooses his people regardless of their deeds or works (9:10-18). But at the end of the chapter, he says that they don’t believe because of their stubborn refusal to accept grace (9:30-33). It may seem like a contradiction, but everywhere in the Bible this same balance is maintained.

Put another way: His plan works through our choices, not around or in spite of our choices. For example, God sets his plan by rendering our choices certain and yet doing so without destroying our responsibility. The Greek notion of “fate” or the Islamic notion of “kismet” are quite different from the Christian doctrine of God’s sovereignty. The Greek myth of Oedipus reveals “fatalism.” Oedipus is fated to kill his father and marry his mother. Though he and all around him do all they can to avoid this fate, he ends up accomplishing it. He and his parents make every effort to avoid it, but it occurs despite his choices. But the Christian concept is quite different. Our choices have consequences, and we are never forced by God to do anything other than what we want. But God works out his will perfectly through our willing actions. It is a marvel!

“Why does man act as he does?... Well, there are only three ultimate explanations. One is called contingency — that there is no rhyme or reason in anything; it is accidental and haphazard. The second is the doctrine of [determinism]... ‘you cannot help it, you are like that...’ Everything is determined and you are not free at all... There is the biological view... They say that what a man is, is determined by various glands in his body... There is... psychoanalysis. One Freudian said, ‘psychoanalysis has undermined our confidence in the reality of free will... by showing how often our apparently deliberate actions are in fact determined by motives of which we are unaware...’ So there it is. [Those are] the alternatives to the teaching of the Apostle Paul. [Either we are determined by natural forces, or things happen randomly by chance] but the third explanation is the biblical doctrine of certainty. [That we make responsible choices but all under the sovereignty of God.]

– D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 9:1-33

THE BIBLE PROVIDES EXAMPLES OF HOW GOD WORKS:

1. Judas. Acts 2:23 tells us Jesus was crucified according to God’s plan, yet by “wicked hands.” The actions of the people who killed Jesus were wicked, and they were liable for them, yet God used their wicked intentions to carry out the crucifixion exactly how and when he wanted it.

2. Jacob. Jacob deceived his father and robbed his brother; as a result he had to flee his homeland and experience great suffering and injustice in a foreign land. Yet there he met the love of his life and had the children through whom Jesus was descended. Now,

it is clear that his sin did not put him into a “Plan B” for his life. It was all part of God’s perfect plan for him. Ultimately God worked his sin out for good. Yet was he therefore not responsible for his sin? Yes, he was. Did he not suffer consequences for his foolish behavior? Yes, he did. But God was infallibly in control, even as Jacob was completely responsible.

3. Paul in the storm. In Acts 27, when Paul was in the storm-wracked boat, he prophesied to the passengers, “There shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but we will lose the ship.” (v.22) By revelation he revealed God’s plan. Their preservation was certain. Yet in v. 31 Paul warns them not to get into the life boat. “Unless the men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved!” Despite the certainty of God’s plan, it was equally true that the men were responsible to act and choose wisely. Paul did not say, “Well, God predestined you all to survive this storm, so it does not matter what you do.” When God appoints a result, he also appoints the means — our choices and efforts. Paul did not have the Greek notion of fate — such statements make no sense in the fatalistic framework!

“He brings to pass the actions of personal beings in a way that preserves their freedom and responsibility to the full. Is that inconceivable? We can persuade others, yet their freedom is preserved when they do what we persuaded them to do of their free will. Shall not then God be able to do with certainty what we with our little power do with uncertainty? Does God who made the soul know how to move it in accordance with its own nature so that its freedom is not destroyed?”

– J. Gresham Machen

C. People who choose God do so strictly because God has opened their hearts, people who do not do so strictly because they closed their hearts.

1. Only God is responsible for our salvation.

Romans 3:11– “No one seeks for God.” Romans 8:7 – “The natural mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to the law of God, indeed it cannot.” Romans 9:11-16 – “Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works, but by him who calls... ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated...’ it does not therefore depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

Paul teaches that through sin, we have lost the ability to see the truth or desire to serve God. “No one seeks for God.” Paul is not saying that the human will is not free to do what we want. We are free in that sense. “But,” he is saying, “we cannot ever want God. We aren’t free to choose him.” Our mind does not submit, indeed it cannot. We will never want God, we are incapable of choosing God, unless God breaks in. And that is what he does. “It does not therefore depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” We don’t initiate our salvation — we don’t even want it. God wakes us up from a helpless sleep; he unlocks us from a helpless state. One great hymn puts it perfectly.

Long my imprisoned Spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
 I woke — the dungeon flamed with light!
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed thee!
 — Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be?"

2. Only we are responsible for our condemnation.

Romans 11:21-24 – "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for [honor] and some for [dishonor]? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, who he prepared in advance for glory — even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"

In these 3 verses in Romans 11 we have the important and crucial "asymmetry" of the Biblical gospel, namely this: God alone prepares any person for spiritual glory, but we alone prepare ourselves for spiritual destruction. There are two basic competing views. (They correspond somewhat but not completely "determinism" and "contingency.")

#1 – "Hyper-Calvinism." Fatalism is found in Greek thought or Islam or Eastern religions, but some Christians over the years have adopted it as well. In this view, God equally and symmetrically prepares all people for their fate. God in his sovereign will has determined to have some people lost and some saved, and he goes about directing each group down each path in the same way. In other words, God prepares us for glory OR God prepares us for destruction.

#2 – "Pelagianism." (The name is taken from Pelagius, a 5th century monk.) This view is also found in ancient and modern thought, though it is very prevalent in the West in the last two centuries. In this view, every person has the ability to choose good or evil, to serve God or self, and this ability is equal with every individual. Thus every person who is saved is saved in the very same way as every person who is lost — by his or her exercise of this ability to choose. So we prepare ourselves for glory OR we prepare ourselves for destruction.

But in Romans 11:22-24, Paul very carefully refuses to take either view. Paul says "he" prepared some vessels for glory, but not that God prepared vessels for destruction. It does say they were "prepared" for condemnation, but that he had to endure them with great patience, so clearly their preparation is not his doing. This must mean that all human beings have freely chosen sin and deserve condemnation. God could allow us all to perish as we have chosen, and he does allow some to go to the destruction they have prepared for themselves. But he breaks in and opens the eyes of some, who he prepares for glory.

This is the only way to understand Paul. If one takes a fatalistic view, you cannot explain Paul's reticence to say that God prepared the vessels for destruction. But if one adopts the view that every individual is equally capable of choosing God, that leads to the conclusion that God does nothing more for saved people than for lost people, and thus salvation is not by grace. The vessels prepare themselves for glory! (See below under Objections for more.)

Here are two commentators on Romans 11:21-24, explaining how Paul's view "threads the needle" between these two mistaken views:

"Paul's picture is that of a potter making various utensils and implements for household use and so on... Now creation means creating out of nothing... [but] the potter does not create the clay... it is there in front of him on the bench and he is now going to do something with it... [so] the Apostle is not dealing here at all with God's purpose in the original creation of humanity... God created man 'in his own image and likeness...' He looked upon [us] and upon the whole of creation and we are told He saw that 'it was good.' God never created anything unto dishonor, but here is a potter who makes a vessel unto dishonor. That proves that he is not dealing with human nature as [human, but as fallen]. It is an account of what God does with fallen humanity..."

Many people... [think] God deliberately made some people that they might go to hell. That is a lie! It is not taught anywhere in Scripture... the Apostle is asserting that the whole humanity... is already lost and under condemnation — everybody... All deserve damnation (Rom.5:12- death passed to all, for all sinned)... Nobody deserves mercy, not one!... We have no claim upon God to give us mercy... [But] no one is created evil. It is inconceivable. God created all things good. No one has ever been forced to sin. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any one. (James 1:13). [Humanity]... rebelled against God and sinned... And what the Apostle is dealing with here is what God does with humanity in the light of that, and he says he has an absolute right to do as He wills in His own sovereign will and Lordship. With such a hopeless mass, which could be all consigned to perdition, He has nevertheless, because of His grace and glory and His purpose, chosen and elected and formed some out of that mass unto glory and honor..."

Now that alone is what the Apostle tells us here. He does not go any further because... he does not know. What we all want to ask at this point is: Why [and]... How does God decide to make one unto honor and one unto dishonor? There is only one answer to that — I do not know! Nobody else does... I cannot go beyond the Scripture, and all the Scripture tells me is that God does that and that He has a right to do it, and that if I raise the question... I am trying to contend with my Maker.

So let me put the teaching to you like this: If anyone is saved it is entirely because of the mercy and choice of God... but I add this: if people are lost, it is entirely their own responsibility.

– D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 9:1-33

"If anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This antinomy contains a mystery which our present knowledge cannot solve; but it is consistent with Scripture, history, and experience."

– John Stott, *Romans*

OBJECTIONS AND QUESTIONS**1. Isn't "election" just a Pauline doctrine?**

No. Though Paul does teach it in Romans and elsewhere (see also I Thess.1:4,5; II Thess.2:13,14; 2 Tim.1:9; Eph.1:3ff.), the doctrine permeates the rest of Scripture. Just a couple of examples:

Jesus' teaching in John:

John 6:36-39 "But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." *John 6:44* "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 10:25 – "Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.'"

Notes: Here Jesus says twice – a) if someone doesn't believe, it is because God has not "given" them to him, b) everyone who is given to him will come to him and will never be lost. Why can Jesus make these two statements? Because of a third principle which is a premise for the first two — no one is capable of coming to God unless God is drawing him. (This accords with Paul in Romans 3:11, that no one seeks for God.) Therefore, if anyone is seeking, it is because God is drawing. If God is drawing, they will be saved and kept.

Peter's teaching:

I Peter 1:1-2 – "To God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood..."

Luke's teaching:

Acts 13:48 – "When the Gentiles heard this [preaching from Paul and Barnabus], they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." *Acts 16:13-14* – "On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

Notes: Notice that Luke does not say "as many as believed were appointed to eternal life" but "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Thus the belief is a result of the appointment, not the appointment the result of the belief.

2. But election just complicates the simple gospel! I wish it hadn't been brought up!

No — election establishes the simple gospel. The main reason (the strongest argument) for the doctrine is that rejecting it creates far more problems than it solves. Why?

Unless you embrace the doctrine of election, you are forced to hold that salvation is not by grace alone and God alone, but is due ultimately to something better in those who believe.

Here is a penetrating line of reasoning:

“There is one final argument. People seem to think that if you reject this doctrine [of election] you are in a happy position. You say, ‘I do not believe that it is God who elects and hardens. A man must be free, it must depend upon man’s own choice and decision.’ But wait a minute... Let me show you where you are if you reject this doctrine of Paul as taught here. Take Acts 28:24...’ Some believed the things that were spoken and some believed not...’ [Now] why do some believe and some not? Those people... [were] all of them the same: same background, same everything, but some believed and some did not... What decides it?

‘Ah’, says somebody, ‘it is quite simple. Free will!’ Very well, one chooses to believe, the other chooses not to believe... [but] — why? What is it that makes some want to believe and others not? ‘Oh well,’ you say, ‘one saw things in one way, and the other in a different way’. Yes, but... why does one see it like this, the other like that? Let us go further back...”

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 9:1-33

The speaker goes on to point out that, if we keep asking why does one believe and the other not? And if we reject the idea of election, then we are forced to eventually say that one of the persons was humbler or more open to the truth or more virtuous in some way. In other words, the real differentiating factor, and the critical cause of one’s salvation over others is something better in you. In other words, you are back into justification by works! Paul already mentioned that the doctrine of election is necessary to preserve the doctrine of justification. Romans 9:11-16 – “Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works, but by him who calls.”

Therefore, the final case for the doctrine of election is that it reminds us of what we already know — that we are saved by sheer grace alone, not on the basis of anything in us. Yes, “election” causes many difficulties. But the best reason for accepting the doctrine is that every alternative creates even more problems and difficulties. Without “election” you compromise the central teaching of the Bible, that we are saved by grace alone, not our works. If the difference between the unbeliever and the believer is ultimately in us (a greater humility, a greater openness, etc.) then we are the real authors of our salvation).

3. If you believe in election, doesn't that leave you with the problem of why God doesn't choose to save everyone?

Yes, but so do Christians who don't believe in election. Election doesn't "create" the problem, it only leads us to think about it. So to deny the doctrine of election does not help you escape that problem. All Christians have this problem, and therefore you cannot object to election by appealing to it. The person who does not believe in election has the same problem: a) God wants everybody saved, b) God could save everyone, but c) God does not. Why? That is the ultimate mystery, but abandoning the doctrine of election does not answer it.

Someone says: "But I believe that though God doesn't want us to be lost, some are lost because they choose wrong and God will not violate their freedom of choice." But why is freedom of choice sacrosanct? I try to honor my child's freedom of will, but not if I see he is about to be killed by it! Why can't God "insult" our freedom of will for a moment and save us for eternity? No — regardless of whether you think we are saved by our choice or by God's election, you still have the same question: Why couldn't God save us all if he has the power and desire to do so? It is a hard question, but it cannot be used as an argument against the doctrine of election.

We can go further. Suppose election is not true, that eons ago, God set up salvation upon this system — that every person will have equal ability to accept or reject Christ, who will die and be raised and be presented through the gospel message. But the moment God determined to set up salvation on that system (assuming for the moment that he did), he would have immediately known exactly which persons would be saved and which condemned on that basis. So the minute he "set it up," he was *de facto* electing some and passing over others.

We all come out to the same place. God could save all, but he doesn't. Why not? We can only know two things:

- 1) The answer must have something to do with his perfect nature. He is perfectly loving and perfectly righteous and neither can be preferred over the other or he would not be God. So somehow the answer has to do with his being consistent with himself.
- 2) We cannot see the whole picture. Why? If we can conceive of a more merciful system of salvation than God has, we must not see it aright, for God is more merciful than us or even than our imaginations. When we finally see the whole plan and answer, we will not be able to find fault with it.

4. But it isn't fair for God to elect some and not others.

It is one thing for a doctor to see five patients and only choose two to treat — that would be unjust, because as a doctor he owes care to all. But if a judge condemns a number of patients and pardons some — it is more than just, it is merciful, for he owes nothing to any of them. The question is not why doesn't he take all, but why he takes any.

“Here are five people who are planning to hold up a bank. They are friends of mine. I find out about it and plead with them. I beg them not to do it. Finally they push me out of the way and they start out. I tackle one of the men and wrestle him to the ground. The others go ahead, rob the bank, a guard is killed, they are captured, convicted, sentenced... The one man who was not involved in the robbery goes free. Now I ask you: Whose fault was it that the other men died? Now this other man who is walking around free, can he say, ‘Because my heart is so good, I am a free man?’ The only reason that he is free is because of me; I restrained him. So those have no one to blame but themselves. But those who go to heaven have no one to praise but Jesus Christ. Thus we see that salvation is all of grace from beginning to its end.”

– D.J.Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*

5. But it makes God seem arbitrary

No — it makes God gracious. The Bible doesn’t say that God’s election has no reasons for it. We know that God always does what is right (Gen.18:25) and wise (Rom.11:33). There is no indication that God chooses us at (what we would call) “random” — eeny, meeny, miney, moe! He has reasons, but all we know is that the reasons are not in us. I Cor.4:7 says, “Who makes you to differ from anyone else? What do you have that was not a gift?”

There is one hint as to why he seems to choose some over others, but it is not flattering! I Cor.1:27-29 says, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly and the despised things, even the things that are nothing, to bring to nothing the things that are — so that no one may boast before him.”

This brings up the strongest case for election, as mentioned above. The only alternative to it is to believe that we are saved by something in us which is better than those who are lost. That is a complete contradiction to the Biblical gospel.

6. But if everything is fixed and certain, why pray or evangelize or do anything at all?

This objection is short-sighted. First, if everything was not planned by a holy and loving God, then we should be absolutely terrified by the prospects of even getting up in the morning. Our actions (always done with very little understanding) could have horrible consequences. Everything would depend on us! If everything was not planned by a holy and loving God, there is enormous pressure on Christians when we evangelize. We know that our being inarticulate could result in a person missing his or her one “chance” for salvation. It is a horrible prospect.

Second, the reason we evangelize and pray is because of the privilege of sharing in God’s work with him. For example, a father might be able to chop wood for the stove himself, but he asks his children to learn to chop the wood and stoke the fire as well. What if the children say, “We have no incentive to chop the wood, because we know that if we don’t cut it, father will do it anyway — he won’t let us freeze!” But the father would say, “Of course I could do it myself, but I want you to share the work with me!”

The authority and the privilege of working with our heavenly Father is plenty of incentive! He wants to work with us and for us.

Also, we are not supposed to second guess God. We are never to try to guess who is “elect” — ever! God calls all to repentance and so should we. In fact, the doctrine of election should give us far more hope about working with people. Why? No one is a hopeless case! From a human point of view, many people look totally hard and lost, but since salvation is by God’s election, we should treat everyone and anyone with hope, since God calls the dead to life through us.

7. Doesn’t this lead to a superior attitude — to think that you are ‘elect’?

With all due respect, such a question shows that you really have not been listening to the doctrine of election! The doctrine has the completely opposite effect. As we said under “Objection #2” above, it is the denial of election that will lead you to logically feel superior to those who don’t believe. If we deny election, believers will be strongly tempted to say to unbelievers, “Why can’t you see this like I can? you must be more stupid or proud than I was!”

But the doctrine of election says believers are chosen people, not a choice people. We are not chosen for our superior qualities. The reasons that we are chosen are not in us. There is no superiority of believers over unbelievers.

8. I believe the Bible, and I see all the teaching about election, but why do I still dislike it so?

My theory is that the Biblical gospel is so supernatural, that it always combines qualities that by natural reason and culture we cannot keep together. The doctrine of justification is one way of looking at the gospel. It combines both law and love in ways that no one could have thought up. We are saved apart from the law so that now we can obey the law. All other philosophies either are law-ism (legalistic) or law-less (antinomian). Now the doctrine of election is just the gospel looked at from another perspective. It combines the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of human beings. Here too, we find that human philosophies and cultures cannot combine these things. So whoever you are, you come from a culture that has saturated you in some view that is so unbalanced, that you will see and hear the doctrine of election as something more simple and extreme than it really is.

Eastern philosophies and religions have always been more fatalistic, and believe individual autonomy to be an illusion. Thus when people from that background come to the gospel, they may see it as being “just individualism.” On the other hand, Western secularism believes strongly in the right and power of individuals to determine their own course and destiny. Thus when people from that background come to the gospel, they see it as being “just fatalism.”

Thus, depending on which “side” we come from, depending on our culture or temperament, we must be careful to see the carefully nuanced balances of the gospel of free justification and election. We must remember our prejudices that we bring with us to the Scripture. We must be willing to learn to balance our own views out.

Practical application

In the end, the Christian concept of God’s sovereignty is a marvelous, practical principle. It is mysterious but not confusing. It brings security and confidence:

1. In the difficulties of life. It means we have great incentive to use our wisdom and our will to the best effect, knowing God holds us to it and knowing we will suffer consequences from foolishness and wickedness. On the other hand, there is an absolute promise that we cannot ultimately mess up our lives. Even our failures and troubles will be used for God’s glory and our benefit. How profoundly comforting. “God performs all things for me!” cries the Psalmist (Ps. 57:2). We develop a sweet, inward spirit, a quiet delight in every disposal of God’s will. Even wickedness and tragedy, which we know comes from the evil of this world and the human heart, which evil God did not design or create, is nonetheless woven into a wise plan.

But the promise of Romans 8, of “all things working together for good,” is a promise to believers. It is a guarantee to those who are adopted into God’s family through faith in Jesus as savior. If you are not in the family, even good things in your life may not be for your benefit. They may harden us to make us proud and blind to the fact of our need and dependence. But for God’s children, his sovereignty is always exercised in a way of love and mercy.

2. In the intimacy of praise and worship. Electing love is ultimate love. If God loved us because he found something better in us, then we’d always be afraid of losing his love. And we’d never find his love a total miracle. But God does not say, “I love you because you are serviceable to me” or “I love you because you are more humble than others.” He says, “I love you simply because I love you.” That is perfect love. This understanding is a fountain of endless praise and gratitude and thanksgiving.

Romans

New relationships: God and the Church

Study 19 | Romans 12:1-8

Summary

12:1-2 – How to relate to God

- v.1 Offer yourselves
 - v.1a How: remember who he is (mercies)
 - v.1b What: your entire life as sacrifice
 - v.1c Why: it is your logical service
- v.2 Be transformed
 - v.2a Don't: be conformed to this world
 - v.2b Do: be transformed by mind renewal
 - v.2c Result: discernment of the will of God

12:3-4 – How to relate to ourselves

- v.3a Assess yourself with humility and accuracy
- v.3b You are the same: in your standing in the gospel (the standard of faith)
- v.4 You are different: in your abilities to minister (not... same function)

12:5-8 – How to relate to others in the church

- v.5 We are all one – not separate.
- v.6a We are all distinct – not absorbed.
- v.6b Some prophesy
- v.7a Some serve people's material needs
- v.7b Some teach
- v.8a Some counsel
- v.8b Some give generously
- v.8c Some lead
- v.8d Some work with the poor and sick

1. vv.1-2 What two things does Paul urge us to do? What do they mean practically?

The word "therefore" means that Paul is going to give an outline of Christian living which should issue from a knowledge of the gospel that he has been expounding. Thus 12:1-2 is a kind of summary of the whole of the Christian life!

First, we are told to “offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.” Paul uses “temple” terminology here. The metaphor he uses is that of a worshipper at the temple, who comes in with an offering. Now some offerings in the Old Testament were “sin offerings,” in which the worshipper was shedding blood and asking forgiveness. But Jesus is our sin offering — that is what the entire book of Hebrews is about. Therefore, the offering Paul points to is not a sin offering. The second kind of offering was a “whole burnt offering,” which was a valuable animal from your flock. It had to be without defect (holy and without blemish). Why? Such an animal was expensive! It showed that all you had was at God’s disposal — you did not give God your leftovers! The burnt offering was always burnt *totally*, and it represented complete consecration and devotion to God.

To be “at God’s disposal” fully means: a) actively, to be willing to *obey* God in anything he *says* in any area of life, and b) passively, to be willing to *thank* God for anything he *sends* in any area of life.

Another way Paul gets across the idea of totality or entirety is by urging them to offer our *bodies*. This was probably startling to Graeco-Roman readers, who were brought up to believe that the body was negative and bad, and that spirituality was to cultivate the mind and soul. But Paul is saying that God does not just want a purely inward and abstract worship, but a practical and total one. He wants us to give him everything that we do.

“Paul made it plain, in his exposure of human depravity in 3:13ff, that it reveals itself through our bodies, in tongues which practice deceit and lips which spread poison, in mouths which are full of cursing and bitterness, in feet which are swift to shed blood, and in eyes which look away from God. Conversely, Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So we are to offer different parts of our bodies... to God as ‘instruments of righteousness’ (6:13,16,19). Then our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen... our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

The word “living” may mean that the sacrifice is a constant thing. The word sacrifice actually means “to kill.” That makes it a “living killing!” It means that we have to continually renew our position as wholly obedient and at God’s disposal.

Secondly, we are told to “not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed.” (Though someone might say that the “second thing” is to be “renewed in the mind,” closer examination shows that mind-renewal is the means to the end of transformation. See under question #3 for discussion about mind-renewal). What does this mean? There are two patterns held up — the pattern of the world, and the pattern of God’s will. Paul tells us to recognize and reject the pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving that characterizes the world, and to embrace the will of God for all character and life. The word “conform” is in contrast to “transform,” however. And that is

interesting. The word “transform” is the Greek word *metamorpho*. The only other place Paul uses it is in II Cor.3:18. It clearly refers to an inner transformation, rather than merely an outward conformity. Notice that such an inner transformation is necessary because the will of God has to be “tested” by us. It takes wisdom and goodness to discover more of the wise and the good!

In summary, Paul says we have put ourselves entirely at God’s disposal and become transformed from the inside out into the image of him.

2. v.1 a) What does Paul show as the only sufficient motivation for the hard work of Christian living? b) What other motivations are possible and how are they ineffective?

a) There are two words that show the motivation for Christian living. First the word “therefore” indicates that we give ourselves to God because of all that Paul has been expounding in chapters 1-11, namely that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. The second word, “in view of the *mercies* of God,” essentially says the same thing. In short, the only sufficient motivation for the Christian life is *gratitude for grace*.

b) This is especially important to notice in connection with Paul’s magnificent and unsurpassed argument in Romans 8 that Christians cannot lose their salvation or their place in God’s love. If a Christian could possibly lose salvation, then surely the overriding motivation for obedience would be fear. Non-Christians generally do not believe in God’s wrath and thus do not find it very frightening. But we do know about it, so if a Christian believes that it is possible to come back under that condemnation, then the fear of that would be immense. Fear-based obedience is more negative (afraid of punishment) than it is positive (gratitude for grace).

If fear is the primary motivation for our obedience, we should see the following effects: 1) We will find our motivation losing its power after time. Fear as an emotion is very draining. It moves you to great feats at first, but eventually it is exhausting. People who live in great fear find a numbing effect after a while. Slowly, one becomes too tired to care — indifferent to what happens. Fear-based religion therefore often tends to be short-lived. 2) Also, fear-based obedience has a great deal of trouble with repentance. When we are motivated by fear, we believe that somewhere there is a “line” — if we sin too much, we cross it, and God will condemn us. But we don’t know where that line is. As a result, we find repentance not a sweet thing but always very bitter. We won’t have the security to admit our sins, for fear of reprisals from God, so we will do a lot of rationalizing and blaming. 3) But fear-based obedience will always make it difficult to take suffering or troubles. The fear-based person will either think a) “God is paying me back — God has abandoned me! Maybe I crossed the line!” or b) “This isn’t fair! The reason I obey is so God blesses me, so these bad things won’t happen!” In other words, either despair or bitterness will be the result of suffering, if one’s Christian life is fear-based.

3. vv.1-2 How does Paul explain what is the right way to overcome spiritual stagnation and disobedience? i.e. How can we bring our hearts to “offer” ourselves wholly?

First, Paul encourages us to “view” the mercies of God. This would mean that if we lack a passion or interest in being holy, it comes from a sheer lack of contemplation of the mercies of God toward us. On the other hand, the only non-mechanical way to get ourselves back on a track of obedience is to begin a discipline of reflection and focus upon the mercies of God. This does not mean that we should not begin to obey God *immediately*, whether we feel like it or not! But there is no way to sustain a pattern of holiness and Christian living without a “kindling” of our heart by deep meditation on the mercy and grace of God. How do we do that specifically?

The word “mercies” is plural, which surely means that we are to think not of God’s mercy in general, but his merciful acts and deeds. At the simplest level, it means we could “count our blessings” and consider the numerous mercies God has given us as individuals. But ultimately, surely, Paul is inviting us to look at the cross. What tells us that? Paul says that our look at the mercy of God must lead us to “offer your bodies as... sacrifices.” That is an obvious reference to Christ, who (Paul says elsewhere) offered himself as a sacrifice (Eph.5:1-2).

Second, Paul tells us to offer ourselves because this is your spiritual worship. Unfortunately, the English translation in the NIV and other modern translations obscures an important point. In the Greek, Paul says, this offering of ourselves is our “rational” (*logican*) worship. The word is literally “logical,” and means *both* that a) the whole offering is only logical in light of the mercies of God and b) we must offer ourselves “rationally,” compelled by our clear thinking on this subject. In short, anything less than a total, complete sacrifice of ourselves to God is completely irrational! If you give yourself partially or half-heartedly, you are simply not thinking, you are not looking at what Jesus did. Years ago, I heard a preacher say, regarding this verse, something like this: “This means that to fail to give yourself in complete and total obedience to God is not merely an offense to the moral sense, but it is a crucifixion of the intelligence. It is as stupid as it is wicked. Think! How can you come to grips with someone who has given himself utterly to you, without giving yourself utterly to him?”

If such “heart reasonings” as this do not move you, do not break the ice over your soul, you must ask yourself if you have ever understood the gospel.

Third, Paul tells us that the Christian life occurs through the “renewing of the mind.” Paul does not really explain what this means, but it is important, for it is the way we are to be transformed into the pattern of Christ. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to see the mind-renewal as just another way to talk about “viewing the mercies” and “rational worship.” We are to have our minds inflamed with the truth about Christ! Elsewhere Paul gives us hints about mind-renewal. It is not less than intellectual — it does mean to have truth from God’s word “dwell in us richly” (see Col.3:9-16). But it is more than that. In Eph.4:23 Paul tells us to “be made new in the spirit of your minds.” This probably means not just that we are to think true thoughts, but that the very

governing influence of our mind is to be re-oriented. In modern terminology, one's "imagination" is captured by Christ. Who he is and what he did "fires the imagination," it controls our mind. But this only happens when the Holy Spirit uses the truth in us in that way (I Cor.2:11-14). Thus our mind is renewed through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, resulting in "holy reasonings" that move us to offer ourselves as sacrifices.

4. vv.3-4 What two mistakes should Christians avoid when thinking of themselves?

On the one hand, Paul tells us to avoid being "high-minded" about ourselves. Despite all the warnings about the danger of low self-esteem, the *real* danger is self-centeredness and egocentricity. Most of the world's religions have identified humanity's worst problem as stemming from inflated views of one's own importance and abilities and rights (Buddhism is particularly insistent on this point.) We are all prone to exaggerate our own level of wisdom and competence and sincerity and power. As Christians, we must be able to avoid this. C.S.Lewis said he knew of no one except Christians who ever admitted to being proud and conceited. Paul shows us that we must always be on the look out for this danger. (This is important to set up his statements on spiritual gifts in vv.6-8. An inflated view of the self tends to make us think we can do all things well, and it keeps us from forming interdependent relationships.)

On the other hand, we are to think "soberly." Sobriety here means just what we think of as an alternative to drunkenness. To be sober means to be rigorously accurate, completely in touch with reality. Paul does not say here "be humble" or "prefer others as better than yourselves." At this point he warns against thinking *less* of your abilities than is warranted as well. We are to think straight about ourselves, not too low or too high.

5. vv.3-4 From what two sources does a Christian get his or her self-image?

[This answer will probably not be immediately evident to the students!] As soon as Paul tells the Romans to 'think soberly', he then first tells them to do so 'in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you' (v.3b). And then he proceeds to give them another way to think of themselves, as persons with different gifts in one body (v.4).

Most people reading this verse have thought that the 'measure of faith' means "the amount of faith." In other words, Paul is saying that our opinion of ourselves depends on the amount of faith we have, God having given some more than others. In the context of all Paul has been saying in Romans, that seems unlikely. Besides, the word "measure" is the Greek word "*metron*" ("meter"), and it most likely means a *standard* of measurement, not an amount. In other words, Paul is saying: "All of you have been given your saving faith in Christ crucified, and that is how you are to measure yourself." That means we are first to *realize we are all the same*. Regardless of our background, abilities, etc., we are all saved in Christ. God loves us equally "in Christ." So we should

also think of ourselves. This is then a very direct command to *start our self-appreciation by remembering who we are in the gospel*. The first “measure” by which we evaluate ourselves is the gospel in which we believe.

Secondly, we are to think of ourselves as having distinct gifts and abilities within the Body of Christ. In other words, *we are all different* as well. We are not “clones.” Paul elsewhere says that “you are God’s workmanship, created in Christ for good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do.” Isaak Dinnessen put it: “Pride [good pride] is faith in the idea God had when he made you.” We have each been given distinct personalities and temperaments and histories and abilities that equip us for doing a particular set of good works in the world that God has created us to do. So the second way to get a good “self-image” is to get to work in ministry, find out what God has equipped you to do best, and do it with all your might!

6. vv.3-8 Discern the “steps” or ways that Paul says one should take in order to discern one’s spiritual gifts.

1. **Self-examination.** Paul says “take a sober look at yourself” with regard to gifts. So to begin with, we look at our own heart to begin to discover gifts. What do we look at?
 - A. We can look at our *feelings* — what do we enjoy doing? What kind of ministry is satisfying and attractive to you?
 - B. We can look at our *perceptions* of needs — what problems do you most notice? Do you notice and feel burdened for the poor? For people with counseling needs? Do you feel the church is too disorganized? In other words, it is possible that you are especially sensitive to the kinds of needs God has called you to meet.
 - C. We can look at our *effectiveness* — are we any good at what we enjoy? Do people get helped? Ask those who know you, to be sure that your judgment is “sober” and rigorously accurate.
2. **Experience.** In v.6, Paul says, “having... let him use it” In general, you don’t learn your gifts before you do ministry, but you learn your gifts as you minister. You may think you have a set of gifts in a particular area — well, work in that area. You may come to revise your understanding of your gifts as you do ministry. It is best to try all kinds of ministry as a way to learn your spiritual “aptitudes.”
3. **Study the Biblical lists.** In vv.6-8 Paul gives an illustrative list of spiritual gifts. Why does he do that? We know from I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 that this list does not contain all the gifts Paul knows of. Probably the gift-list was there to let the readers take an inventory. It is hard to discern your own gifts if you don’t have many categories of spiritual ability through which to look at yourself. So it is helpful and important to look at the spiritual gift lists and characters of the Bible so you can better process your own experience.

7. vv.6-8 Give each gift a brief definition, on the basis of what you know from the rest of the Bible. Which ones could possibly describe you?

This is not an easy exercise, because even if the students do know enough about the rest of the Bible to have an opinion, people's opinions differ! However, apart from the first gift of prophecy, the rest of the gifts are not controversial. See Teaching G - *Spiritual Gifts* for more details at a later time.

Prophecy probably is not the gift of giving divinely inspired messages from God. Some places in the New Testament, the prophet seems to give divine messages like in the Old Testament (e.g. Agabus in the book of Acts), but in I Cor.12:28 Paul puts the prophets in a subordinate position to apostles, who had divine authority. Also, here the prophet is told to prophesy "according to the measure of his faith." Many people read that as meaning "the amount of his faith," but literally the Greek reads "according to the analogy of his faith," a word that means the standard. In other words, Paul is saying that the prophet must not prophesy in such a way as to contradict the doctrine of the Christian faith. Now, if prophecy was a divine word direct from God, why would such a rule be laid down? It could be that the word "prophecy" could have more than one meaning. Here it seems to mean preaching, of anointed utterance.

Service. This is the word *diakonia*, which means "practical service." People with gifts of service are good at the practical, and good at administration. They are great team workers and do not need the spotlight.

Teaching. This is the gift of making truth very clear and understandable. A good teacher may not be a good preacher and vice versa. And teaching gifts can vary greatly — some are better in small groups, other in large groups, some with children, some with peers, and so on.

Encouragement. This is the word *parakaleo*, which means to "come alongside." Encouragement is a good translation, but it also includes most of what today we would call "counseling" — support, inspiration. But encouragers do not necessarily have to be trained and formal counselors. They can serve as advisors and supporters and greeters and welcomers in many ways.

Giving. Persons with this gift not only enjoy giving in unusual proportions, but are extremely wise in their gifts and their generosity is spiritually very fruitful.

Leadership. Leaders are people with the gift of getting people to follow them. They can put a vision before a group and inspire them to get there.

Mercy. This is a gift of people who are specifically moved to work with the poor, the sick, the weak, the prisoner, the addicted, the elderly, and so on.

TEACHING G

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Spiritual gifts

CONTRASTING PARADIGMS OF HUMAN NATURE

In our century, the world has put forth “systems” which answer the question: “Who am I and how should I be spending my life?”

System #1: “Mechanistic” View

You are other-determined. A human beings is a kind of automaton in a universe fixed by natural laws. This is based on a view of life as matter only. Your capacities are determined by your early learning environments — parents, peers, early experiences, later experiences. They are also largely a function of genes and brain chemistry. Aptitudes and abilities, personality and problems, talents, sexuality — all are based in your physiology.

System #2: “Developmental” View

You are self-determined. Human beings are totally free agents in a universe which is random and disorderly. This is based on a view of nature as random, or an illusion, a veneer of impersonal life spirit (Eastern religion), or as simply absurd. You thus have unlimited potential to develop. It is mainly under your own control. The New Age movement talks about “creating your own reality.” The older existentialists and the newer deconstructionists are concerned to stress our complete freedom to construct any identity or develop any capacity.

These two views both leave God out of the picture. There is no need to refer to God in order to discover what to do with one’s life.

System #3: Christian View

You are God-determined. Human beings are designed and shaped by God with gifts and capacities that fit each person for particular work.

You have particular abilities to make you useful to others, called “talents” or “aptitudes” or “gifts” which are given to you by God, and which fit you for certain kinds of work and ministry. On a Christian view of human nature, the first step is discovering gifts and aptitudes, and then education and training adapts to that giftedness and works within the giftedness.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Eph. 2:10

“It is God for his own loving purposes who puts both the will and the action in you.” Phil. 2:13

“There are different kinds of gifts... different kinds of service... different kinds of working, but the same God works through all his purposes.” 1 Cor 12:4-6

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN PARADIGM

We should find work in the world and ministries in the church that fit our gifts. If we do, the implications are:

1. Knowing our gifts come from God, achievement does not lead to the same inflated egos and destructive behavior that arises in successful people operating under paradigms #1 or #2.
2. Yet, knowing our gifts come from God, achievement brings a deep satisfaction, as a constant reminder that God loves you, designed you, and is using you.
3. We know that, even working for a secular business, the principles by which the business has any cohesion at all are those of God's creation, e.g., products that serve people's needs, integrity, treating human beings with dignity, working through giftedness. We also know that incohesion in the business comes from trampling on those principles.
4. We ignore the systems of the world that would have us decide on our place in the world and the church on the basis of money, prestige, fame — we are not to lust after what does not "fit" us.
5. Yet, we know God holds us responsible to steward the level of talent we have, and we have incentive to be extremely diligent and productive (Matt. 25:14ff)

APTITUDES: GIFTS AND TALENTS

Work and ministry is done through aptitudes. An aptitude is both a) a form of action (ability) and b) a motivation for that action. Aptitudes on the level of creation are "talents." On the level of redemption they are "spiritual gifts."

1. "Work" is a way to be useful to someone else. We are dependent creatures, and we need the work of others in order to live, and they need our work as well. For example, I may not know how to make or repair shoes, so I am dependent on the work of someone else. If I pay shoemakers \$60.00 for a pair of shoes, it is a marvelous bargain for me, because in \$60.00 of my time, I could never make such a thing. On the other hand, if I am a farmer, I do something for the shoemaker that he/she couldn't do — I produce food. And so on. All work, then, according to God's design, would be service. Through work humanity becomes interdependent, enriching one another through our work. Our work takes place through our abilities, our talents.
2. "Ministry" is a form of work in which your ability makes you spiritually useful to others. Or to put it in more theologically precise terms, a spiritual gift is an ability to spread the kingdom of God, extending God's rule and influence over a heart, relationship, community.

"Ability to speak or act in a particular way — performing ability, as we may call it—is only a charisma [spiritual gift] if and as God uses it to edify. Some natural abilities [talents]

that God has given he never uses in this way, while sometimes he edifies through performances that to competent judges seem substandard... What constitutes and identifies a charisma is not the form of the action but the blessing of God."

– J.I.Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*

3. "Spiritual Gifts" are not the same as talents. A talent is a natural ability, given by God on the basis of his relationship as Creator, and the purpose of the talent is to enrich the created order, to develop human civilization, to make all human beings an interdependent community. A spiritual gift, on the other hand, is an ability given by God on the basis of his relationship as Redeemer, and the purpose of the gift is to build up the church and spread the kingdom of God, to make Christians into a unified Body. Thus spiritual gifts are given to every Christian, but to Christians only. Often, a talent IS a spiritual gift, and vice versa. For example, the same aptitude functions in one's secular life and in one's church ministry.
4. "Spiritual Gifts" are not the same as graces, or spiritual fruit. Spiritual fruit (see Galatians 5:22ff) are what we are, while spiritual gifts are what we do. Every Christian should have all the fruit, but no Christian has all the gifts. Without the fruit, the gifts eventually become ineffective. Gifts without fruit are like tires without air. On the other hand, the spiritual gifts operate with some independence from the strength of spiritual fruit in a life, and it is common to mistake the operation of gifts for spiritual maturity. Ministry effectiveness is not identical to spiritual closeness to God.
5. "Spiritual Gifts" are not the same thing as Christian duties. Virtually all the gifts are things that all Christians are required to do. (We are all to witness, all to counsel, all to have faith, all to pray for healing, etc.) Thus two opposite mistakes occur, confusing gifts and duties. One is "gift projection," in which a person with a heavy gift-mix in one area (i.e. witnessing, or working with the poor) expects all Christians to be equally motivated.

THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The general authority of every believer to minister

Every believer is a prophet, a priest, and a king.

We are all prophets (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 1:24). Every believer is to exhort (Heb.3:13), counsel (Rom.15:14), evangelize (Acts 8:4) and teach (Col.3:16) with the word "dwelling richly" within. Believer, you must speak!

Every believer is a priest (I Pet.2:9). We all have access to the presence of God, as did the priests of old (Matt.27:51; Heb.4:14-16), and have the responsibility to offer spiritual sacrifices and deeds of mercy (Rom.12:1-2; Heb.13:12,16). Believer, you must serve!

Every believer is also a king (Rev. 1:5,6). We all have authority over the world (I John 5:4), over the flesh (Rom.6:14ff.), and over the devil (Luke 10:20). We all have divine

weapons to demolish strongholds and obstacles to the kingdom of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Believer you must take charge!

This doctrine is called the “universal office” of believer, and it is nothing short of revolutionary. A layperson ministers in word (as a prophet) and deed (as a priest), and need not wait for a pastor to request it (because he is a king). Jesus himself said that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (Matt.11:9-11). Who can outrank an “ordinary” Christian? No one! So we see that every lay person has the responsibility to initiate, to plan, to guide and to manage ministries of both word and deed. Lay people must not be passive.

The specific callings of believers to minister

Though every believer is prophet, priest, and king, each of us has received spiritual gifts that make us especially fruitful in particular areas of ministry. I Corinthians 12:4-6 teaches us: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all.” (NIV) This text can be expounded by asking three questions.

First, “what is a spiritual gift?” A spiritual gift is an ability from the Holy Spirit to meet the needs of people (I Cor.12:7). Gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to every believer; every Christian has one or more (“to each”). Verse 7 also calls it a “manifestation,” which is something visible. (For example, though you may be angry, the anger is not manifest until you do something in anger.) Thus, while spiritual fruit (Gal.5:22f) is what you are, spiritual gifts are what you do. Each gift is an ability to “edify” another (I Cor.14:4), to spread the kingdom of Christ (Eph.4:8), to build up the church (I Cor.12:7). Therefore, though God may adopt a natural “talent” to become a spiritual gift, he often edifies through performances that experts judge as substandard. An excellent example of this is the two great contemporaries, D.L.Moody and C.H.Spurgeon. Spurgeon had such great natural gifts of oratory that, had he not been a Christian, he could have risen to be Prime Minister of Britain. Moody, on the other hand had very few gifts in the area of rhetoric or speech. But God used the preaching of each in mighty ways. Thus J.I.Packer writes, “What constitutes and identifies a charisma is not the form of the action, but the blessing of God.” (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*)

Spiritual gifts generally break into three categories (or four). There are speaking gifts (prophecy, teaching, exhorting, knowledge, evangelism, discernment, missions), and leading gifts (government, administration, wisdom, faith), and serving gifts (giving, service, helps, mercy, hospitality). [Many people talk about a fourth category called ‘sign’ gifts — tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles and healing. But they should probably be seen as serving gifts. For more study about these gifts, ask for the paper on “Extraordinary Gifts” from the Redeemer office.]

Second, “what is a ministry?” Spiritual gifts are expressed through ministries, which are a particular channel of service that focuses on a particular “people need.” On the one hand, a particular gift can be fulfilled through many ministry channels. A person with the gift of wisdom does not simply sit on the “wisdom committee” while a person with

exhortation sits on the “exhortation committee!” For example, the gift of exhortation is the ability to encourage and build up another. A person with this gift could serve as the leader of a single parents fellowship group, since such folk need lots of emotional support. Or the same person could be recruited by the pastor to nurture and help a new believer/church member for a six month period. Or the same person could be teamed with a good teacher in order to start an evangelistic home Bible study. Or this person might be recruited into a peer counselors training program. Notice that each different ministry focuses on a somewhat different people need, but in each case the same gift can be brought to bear.

On the other hand, a particular ministry can be fulfilled through many different gifts. For example, consider what it takes to be a Sunday school teacher. A person with an evangelistic gift could be a good Sunday school teacher, and the class would probably have a good outreach. A person with the gift of mercy could be an excellent teacher for a senior adult class which would become a very supportive, caring fellowship. A person with a gift of teaching will do an excellent job and will probably put more emphasis on content and classroom work. He may not think as much about the social and outreach aspect of the class. We see, then, that (depending on the purpose and philosophy of your Sunday School), you may not want only people with a gift of teaching to be teaching!

Third, “what are `workings” in v.6? Probably that refers to different levels of power and effectiveness granted sovereignly by God. All gifts of teaching are not alike; some teachers are more gifted than others. Now, considering the diversity of “energy levels,” of ministry channels, and of gifts themselves, we see that the varieties of ministry possibilities are overwhelming. No one has been simply stuck into a single slot where he or she must labor. Rather, Christians must recognize their limitations and strengths and go about finding fruitful ministry channels within those areas.

FINDING OUR CALLINGS

Is there a particular kind of need that you “vibrate” to? (“Do I have the affinity?”)

This may be a specific kind of individual human need: a problem or hurt that many people have that you long to help with. Or this could be a corporate need around the church. You may see the need for better organization in some area, or a need for a more welcoming program in another area, or a particular group who you feel the church is overlooking. Or you may see a community or cultural need in the neighborhood or city that you would like to see addressed. Or do you see some existing ministry in the church or community that you find intriguing or very worthwhile. This interest and sensitivity is a clue to your giftedness and calling.

One of the ways that people can discern God’s gifts and calling to them is by noticing the kinds of needs that they are most sensitive to. For example, if you lift up the lid of a piano and sing a B-flat note, only the B-flat string will vibrate. Why? Because it has the “gift of B-flatness.” It was built to pick up that wave length; the other strings are deaf to B-flat. So too, there are some kinds of needs that we vibrate to. As a young pastor, I

had some persons complaining about the lack of evangelism by our church, some about its lack of organization, and some about our lack of care for the elderly. I began to realize that each person was a piano string who, because of the specific gifts, was vibrating to one particular problem. So we should look at the various kinds of human needs and ask if God lays a particular kind of need in a special way on our heart?

What personal, emotional and spiritual resources do you have with which you can meet the need? (Do I have the ability?)

It is not enough to have a desire to minister — we must also have some ability. It is important to assess yourself here. Though you may have the desire, what are your resources?

Possibly, you have little experience in the area of interest. You don't know how good you are at it; you don't know yet whether you have the ministry ability. You need training and assessment. In other words, the "jury is out" as to whether it is a real calling until you have tried it and been evaluated. Secondly, you may be pretty sure about your ability and skill, but some persons have gotten involved in ministries which are too taxing for their level of spiritual maturity. You may be extremely skillful and expert, yet be somewhat new in the faith, or may have personal problems that are not yet under control. You must be willing to humbly consider this reality. You may be too new or immature in the faith to take up real leadership in the area of interest. Thirdly, you may not have the time or schedule resources.

Do you really have what it takes? We must be careful here. Everyone should approach ministry with a sense of helplessness before God and inadequacy without him. But we must also have an accurate self-understanding. We cannot press on into a ministry before God has equipped you or arranged your life so you are prepared for it.

Is there an existing ministry in your church or community? Or do you need to begin one? (Do I have the opportunity?)

The third way to discern God's calling is to ask whether he is "opening doors" for you to do the ministry you envision? There are two basic ways he can open doors.

First, does the church have (or does there exist anywhere in the city) a ministry going on that fits what you would like to do? (i.e. fits your "affinity" and your "ability?") If so, you should plug in there.

Second, if the church does not have anything like this, could you begin one? Here are three questions to evaluate whether God is opening the door of opportunity for you for a new ministry.

- (1) Are there at least 2 or 3 others who share your interest or to whom you can readily communicate your vision? In other words, are you able to inspire and gather anyone else around you to do this?

For example, what if a church makes this announcement: "Sally Smith has a burden to see our church minister to the local home for mentally retarded women. After the evening service tonight, she would like to meet with anyone who would be interested in exploring this possibility through discussion, study, and prayer." What if

repeated efforts to gather people around this work do not elicit positive response and support? The individual can either seek to do the work just through his or her family. Or, the person can conclude that God has not moved the church to begin the ministry. One thing that he or she should not say is: "What's wrong with this church? Why doesn't it love people more?" The individual should remember that God is the keeper of hearts. If you have a burden, then God put it there; it is not the result of your innate goodness and love. If he is not moving others in the same way, look at it as his guidance to you!

(2) Is there really a need for this ministry in the church or community? Is there really an opening for your ministry? For example, what if Sally Smith discovers that there are already a lot (too many!) churches ministering to the residents and families of the home for retarded women? What if the administration of the home has put up numerous barriers to such a ministry? We must ask whether the ministry is really timely and needed. There are three elements in determining the call of God — desire, ability, and opportunity. You may have lots of desire, manpower, and ability, but that does not mean God is calling you.

(3) Before you begin, have you really "counted the cost?" Have you carefully calculated what this ministry may require, and are you and your friends committed to making that investment? If these three questions are all a "yes," then possibly God has opened the door for you to begin a new ministry, as a way of fulfilling your calling as prophet, priest, and king.

As you are involved in ministry over the years, you should occasionally go through inventories of spiritual gifts. Your experience will help you now have good perceptions of what you are good at.

SOME GIFT LISTS

The three key Biblical lists of spiritual gifts:

Romans 12:6-8

prophecy	exhortation
service	giving
teaching	leadership
mercy	

I Corinthians 12:8-10,28 (besides those mentioned above)

wisdom	tongues
knowledge	interpretation
faith	apostle
healing	helps
discernment	administration

Ephesians 4:11 (besides those mentioned above)

evangelist

pastor

Other spiritual gifts appear to be mentioned which are not on the list of gifts:

hospitality? (I Pet. 4:9-10)

missionary? (Eph.3:1-9)

NOTES

1. Every Christian has spiritual gifts (I Cor.12:7; I Peter 4:10).
2. The gift lists are not complete. It is likely that any Christian duty or ministry can be a gift (e.g. prayer). We should be open to the possibility of other gifts not on the gift list.
3. The gifts are given in clusters. Some people are called "pastor-teachers" (Eph.4:11), yet "teacher" exists by itself as a gift (I Cor).
4. Further diversity is seen in I Cor.12:4-6. There are many gifts, many ministries (avenues for using gifts, e.g. some can teach children, not adults; some can teach large groups, not small, etc.), and different energizings (levels of power or effectiveness). In other words, every Christian is as unique as a snowflake! There are good works prepared for you (Eph.2:10) that only you can do.

Romans

New relationships: Friends and enemies

Study 20 | Romans 12:9-21

Summary

12:9-16 – Love Toward Christians

- v.9a Love without hypocrisy
- v.9b Love with truth
- v.10a Love with affection
- v.10b Love with respect
- v.11 Love with zeal
- v.12 Love with patience
- v.13 Love with practical generosity
- v.14 Love without bitterness
- v.15 Love with empathy
- v.16a Love with unity of mind
- v.16b Love with humility

12:17-21 – Love Toward Enemies

- [v.14 Control of the tongue]
- [vv.15-16 Control of the attitude]
- v.15 Empathy
- v.16 Humility
- vv.17-21 Control of the actions
- v.17a What to avoid: repayment
- vv.17b,20 What to do: plan good deeds
- v.18 What to do: seek peaceful relations
- v.19 Why to do it: only God is judge
- v.21 Summary

1. v.9 What do the three imperatives in this verse have in common? Why are these commands so important for setting up a lifestyle of love?

All three imperatives — “be sincere,” “hate... evil,” “cling to... god” are about *truth*.

First, we are told that our love must be *true to our heart*. Literally, the word “sincere” in Greek is *an-hypokritos* (unhypocritical). We are not to be phony in our dealings with

people. We are not to be polite, helpful and apparently warm on the outside while on the inside despising them. This is so important because, within the church and any community which emphasizes traditional values, a culture of “niceness” can develop in which a veneer of pleasantness covers over a spirit of backbiting, gossip, prejudice. There is a total lack of “tough love” in which people love each other enough to confront and be direct about problems and sins in oneself and in one’s friends.

Second, we are told, both negatively (hate) and positively (cling) that our love must be true to *God’s will*. We are told here that our love must “remember” and operate on the basis of the moral order of God. We must *hate* (literally to “be horrified” by) what God calls evil and we must *cling* (literally, to glue ourselves inseparably) to what God calls good. Why is this so important? Well, because when we love someone, it so often distorts our view of good and evil. Song lyrics capture the problem: “If loving you is wrong, I don’t want to be right!” “It can’t be wrong, if it feels so right!” In other words, if you love someone, your heart is bound up with the heart of the other. Their distress becomes yours and their happiness becomes yours. Therein lies the temptation to give the loved one what creates emotional joy, rather than what is best for them (but which may create emotional sadness or anger). It is an extremely common problem in child rearing. The parents don’t punish children consistently because they cannot bear their tears and anger. But the result of a discipline-less childhood is always disaster.

It may seem strange to tell someone to love, and then to hate in the same sentence, but that is what Paul does. We cannot love rightly without hating rightly! Now we see that this is closely linked to the “sincerity.” *Real* love loves the beloved enough to be “tough.” Real love “is so passionately devoted to the beloved so that it hates every evil which is incompatible with his or her highest welfare.” (Stott) God’s law reveals how our world and our souls were designed. To disobey God’s law is always bad for the beloved. Therefore, real love is concerned about truth.

Any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love, but a selfish desire to be loved. This kind of selfish love is afraid to do what is right (toward God and the beloved) if it risks losing the affection of the beloved. It makes an idol out of the beloved. It says, “I’ll do anything to keep him or her loving me!” *This is not loving the person — it is loving the love you get from the person. In other words, it is loving yourself more than the person.* So any “love” that cuts corners morally or that fails to confront is not really love at all.

But true love is willing to confront, even to “lose” the beloved in the short run if there is a chance to help him or her. Here is a great quote that gets this across.

“Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships... Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys. Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H.Gifford wrote: ‘Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.’ The fact is... anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.”

– Becky Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons*

2. v.9 How can we love unlovely persons who we do not like and yet still be “sincere?”

This does not mean that you should never do a loving deed unless you “feel” loving! It means rather, that as we do loving deeds, we must work on our hearts to put aside condescension, irritability, bias, and selfishness. It is hypocritical to act loving when in your heart you despise someone. On the other hand it is unrealistic to insist that one’s heart be warm and kindly disposed before we do kind actions of love. So what is the solution?

There is a third way. A Christian goes about doing love *while repenting*, softening the heart through the recollection of his sacrifice for us (Rom.12:1-2). How does this work? The gospel is this: we are not loved because we are lovely, in spite of our unloveliness. We are not loved because we have made ourselves worthy of love, but because Jesus died for us *when unattractive* in order to make us attractive. Now if Christians think of this as they are serving unattractive persons, they will find a repentance growing. “Oh, Lord! I was so much more unattractive to you than this person is to me. Yet you were tortured and killed — you gave up your life for me! And all I need to do is to give up some time and effort for this person.” Now a person who does not understand the gospel cannot do this. A person who is just generally moral and nice cannot do this. They have to choose between the two inadequate alternatives, either: a) phony love (niceness toward people you dislike) or b) sporadic love (kindness only toward people you like). But if you show love *as you repent*, your heart is softened as you serve, and your service is sincere toward God at that moment, and *becomes* more sincere toward the people as you go along.

Don’t let this point go by without reflection! Ask: how does the gospel (as opposed to mere moralism) give us the only answer to really sincere love?

3. vv.10-16 Divide the 12-13 exhortations in these verses into 2-3 basic categories. Give a simple Biblical definition of love.

Obviously, there could be more than one way to do this! The purpose of the question is to force the student to think about the meaning of each command and to relate them to each other so as to get a comprehensive Biblical definition of love.

A. Real love is truthful

(v.10). This has been discussed under questions #1 and #2 above.

B. Real love is patient.

In v.10a we are told “Be devoted to one another in brotherly affection.” Both “devoted” (*philostorge*) and “brother love” (*philadelphia*) apply the normal relationships of blood-related family members to the Christian community. Paul is saying that we should love one another as if we were related. Family relationships are extremely basic to us — even if our brothers, sisters, children, parents develop radically different values and lifestyles from us, there is a tie that stays. “He’s still my brother” or “she’s still my daughter” conveys this. Now Paul is saying that Christians who share common values, are to be as patient and doggedly devoted to one another as family members.

Verses 11-12 give us four imperatives that are really calls to patience. At first, these two verses seem to be only about our relationship to God, but we have to notice that they stand in the very middle of numerous directions about Christian relationships. Therefore, Paul is really exhorting us to use all our spiritual resources to *not give up* on the Christian brothers and sisters around us. We must keep our *hope*, and be *patient* in all the troubles we meet, and address all this with *prayer*. How does this relate to Christian fellowship? Perhaps Paul means just that we are to be models to our brothers and sisters when we go through difficulties. But it may be that we are to meet the troubles of Christian relationships with patience and prayer! To be involved deeply in people's lives is hard work. (C.S. Lewis said that the only way to be sure not to have your heart broken is to never give it to anyone.) Since we will give our hearts to people, we will have our zeal (v.11) and our hope (v.12) flag. We are to remember our hope of triumph through Christ, and meet it with prayer.

In v.14 we are told to "bless and do not curse." We will look at this below. But this is another aspect of patience. We are to forgive each other. To forgive means to not pay back.

C. Real love is putting others first.

In v.10b we are told to "honor one another above yourselves." Paul says the same thing in Phil.2:3-'esteem others more highly than yourself'. The word "honor" means to treat someone or something as valuable and precious. There are deep theological roots here. Christianity and Judaism understand that every human being is created in the image of God. We were designed to bear a resemblance to God in our rationality, personality, creativity, our eternal soul, and so on. Therefore, each person we meet is infinitely precious and important, and should be treated as such. It means to listen to the other person, to be most aware of his or her hopes and joys and needs and fears, and to be considerate of them. In addition, when Christians see other Christians, they see not just the image of the Creator, but Christ himself in residence. Now to *honor* above yourselves is not to try to convince yourself that you are inferior to other people. (Romans 12:3-4 tells us to think of ourselves as equal to all others in Christ, and made for special service in the world. Our "self-image" is powerful.) Rather, Paul exhorts us to a simple discipline — to concentrate more on the needs of others than we do on our own. In v.16 we are essentially told the same thing. Real love is not self-centered. "Don't be proud... don't be conceited." "Be willing to associate yourself with people of low position." The essence of love is to not concentrate on our own image and position and needs, but on the needs of others.

D. Real love combines feeling with action.

On the one hand, we are called to "empathy" with others. In a powerful verse, we are called to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (v.15) but then in v.13 Paul essentially says, "put your money where your mouth is." He calls us to "share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." We are to share our homes, our money, our things with those who need them. And v.13 needs to be seen in context with the rest of the exhortations, which press us to be truthful and devoted despite our feelings. So we see that real love is not sentimentality, but an activity of meeting needs.

How can Paul command us to *rejoice or weep*? How can he command emotions? What he is commanding is something within our power. Christians are called here to a discipline (a very hard one) in which we stop and seek to understand the inner world of another person. That can be done by connecting it with your own joys and sorrows. It is hard and unpleasant work to remember our own experiences of grief, and it is work just as hard (though different) to enter into the joy of someone who is not you. (If your friend gets a good thing that you don't have, it is quite difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice). Then on the other hand, we are told to *practice*, Paul is reminding us that love is primarily action.

There are many possible ways to put the Biblical definition of love. Basically, real love is being toward others what Christ was to us. Here are some of the elements:

A deep identification with the condition of the other. Recollect Jesus' incarnation for us. He wept with those who wept. (See D.)

A sacrificing of our needs for the needs of the other. Recollect Jesus' death for us. He honored us above himself. He was patient. (See B. and C.)

An insistence on truth and what is best for the other. Recollect Jesus' ascension and rule for us. He hates evil and clings to good. (See A.)

Love is doing whatever it takes to give them whatever they need. a) "Whatever it takes" means you make sacrifices of emotion and action and your rights. Boundary: the truth of God. b) "Whatever they need" means you give them both the truth (which they may not want) and the help that they need.

4. vv.10-16 How does the gospel alone make each aspect of love possible?

B. Real love is patient.

How the gospel effects this: As noted under #2, the gospel reminds us how patient God was with us. In fact, we were saved not by our works, but simply and solely because he was patient with us. He took all our rebellion without paying us back.

C. Real love is putting others first.

How the gospel affects this: This ability to be respectful (honor-v.10b) toward people who, in the view of human society are beneath us, comes only from the gospel. How? Remember Romans 12:3 — we are to measure ourselves by the faith in Christ crucified God has given us. When we think of ourselves in the gospel, two things happen: a) We realize that we are lost sinners, as lost as anyone else on the face of the earth.

Whoever stands before us — whether the person is a Christian or not, or a "decent" person or not — that person is no "lower" in sin than we are. b) But we also know that, though a sinner, we are wholly justified and loved by God himself. Therefore we have nothing to prove to anyone! Without the gospel, we need to convince ourselves and others about our value and worth by associating with the most admirable persons possible. But now that is unnecessary. Thus Christian love is the most *unbiased* thing possible. Both our knowledge of our sin *and* our knowledge of our acceptance destroy prejudice and pride of race, class, vocation.

D. Real love combines feeling with action.

How the gospel effects this: Again, such a sweeping and profound paradigm for love would be impossible. On the one hand, only if Christ is our *main* joy will we be able to rejoice and weep. For example, if you are single and wish to be married, how can you rejoice for your friend who is getting married? It will be hard in any case, but if marriage is an "idol" (see Teaching D), if your marriagability is your "righteousness," then it will be impossible to rejoice. On the other hand, unless Christ is your righteousness and peace, it will be hard to enter into the griefs of others. One reason you may not be able to weep is that you may have trouble sympathizing with a person you despise or feel better than. (The gospel takes care of this — see under C. above.) Or you may not be able to weep because you must convince yourself that life is good. (If Christ is not your consolation, you will look to circumstances of life for it — and thus you need to deny how hard this life is.)

On the other hand, the gospel enables us to *do* loving deeds even when we don't feel them. Why? When Jesus was hanging on the cross for us, it was pretty clear that his heart was not overflowing with feelings of warmth and affection for us. His love was a sheer act of the will at that moment. "Let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not *my* will but thine be done."

5. vv.10-16 Many think "sacrificial love" is unhealthy. How do the varied exhortations about love balance each other and prevent extremes?

The Bible makes much of Jesus' sacrificial love for us. He was stripped and killed in order to love us. In our day, there is a great emphasis in the psychology/ therapy culture on "being good to yourself." Why? Many counselors see people who are so needy for love (out of a deep conviction that they are unlovely) that they allow others to walk all over them and abuse them. As a result, the wisdom of our age says: "Find out what you want and go for it. Stay in a relationship if it is mutually beneficial for you both. But if you have to make lots of sacrifices, that is unhealthy. Have a better estimate of your own value! You don't need this. Get out. Let the person stand on his/her own feet!"

The problem with this is that it is too simple and reductionistic. The world does not understand the gospel nor the forms of sin and self-righteousness, and therefore it cannot tell the difference between someone who is trying to serve others as a *means of finding* justification and salvation from someone who is trying to serve others as a *response to having* justification and salvation. The classic "enabler" or "co-dependent" is someone who uses sacrifice as a way to feel worthwhile and valuable. If you don't feel acceptable in Christ, you may get that feeling of acceptability from the love of another person. In that case, you make an idol of the beloved, and cannot say "no." Or you make an idol of being needed, and you happily allow yourself to be abused and your martyrdom makes you feel worthy. When this dynamic occurs, the problem is not primarily too little self-love, but too much! The abused person doesn't love the abuser, but loves the love. The abused person is too selfish to tell the abuser the truth and risk his or her loss.

Therefore, v.9 serves as a boundary against any misinterpretation of v.10-16. *It is not loving to let the beloved sin against you.* To allow or promote sin is never the best thing for anyone. Also, “holding fast to what is good” means *we must not sin against ourselves.* In other words, we must not love others in such a way as to disobey God and be poor stewards of our physical and emotional health or of our families.

What then is the “boundary” of sacrificial love, practically speaking? The Bible does not say you must confront people the minute they sin. No, we are to forgive and “cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). It is not until we see a beloved person “caught” in a trespass (Gal.6:1ff) that we are to confront. That means we wait until we see a repeated sinful pattern that is harmful. In short, we must only *let mercy limit mercy.* We are to only stop and confront when to not do so would be unmerciful. We don’t confront out of irritation or love for our own comfort, but out of mercy.

6. v.17-21 a) What things are we to do to those who are hostile to us? b) Why are we to do them? (i.e. what are our motives and reasons)?

See Teaching H for more details.

a) The basic principle laid down in summary in v.21 is “overcome evil with good.” The word “overcome” is a military word, and it means to “overpower.” It is an extremely penetrating and radical insight. Paul says that to repay evil with evil is to immediately lose the battle to evil! The only way to defeat evil is with doing good to the one who has done harm. In other words, if you hate a person who has wronged you, that person has won! The only way to defeat the evil is to forgive and love the person. Another way to put it — when we identify “evil” too closely with the “evildoer,” so to destroy evil is to destroy the evil doer, we unwittingly become a pawn of the evil force that is behind the evildoer. (*In Lord of the Rings*, any good person who uses the Ring of the evil Lord to put down the evil Lord would become evil in the process. It is the same temptation.) So the secret of overcoming evil is for us to see “evil” as something above and distinct from the evil doer. Our basic goal is to forgive and love and show kindness to the evildoer. When we do that, there are two results: 1) The spread of evil is checked toward us. Its hatred and pride does not infect us, and 2) the spread of evil *may* be checked in the evildoer. He or she may be softened and helped by our love. Paul says that our good deeds and words could “pour burning coals on his head,” which is a way of saying that it is possible that repentance may occur. The hostile person may be led to shame and alarm and remorse, rebuked by our kind life.

What this means practically:

1. **To not avoid the hostile person.** v.18 “as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all.” It is common, when someone has wronged you, to simply avoid that person. You may say, “I am not paying them back, but I don’t want to see them.” But your avoidance *could* be a form of payback. To avoid the person does not overcome the evil! (See below for a qualification.)

2. **To express loving words and actions.** v.14 “bless” and v.20 “feed... your enemy.” This means simply that you are to speak and act courteously and kindly to those who are hostile. We must be careful here! For sometimes we may do kind things to a hostile person simply as a way to shame him/her or “rub their nose” in it. That is not the motive. We thoughtfully find ways to wish the person well and do helpful things and speak respectfully to them.

3. **To forgive, and forego any repayment.** v.19 “never avenge yourselves”

There are boundaries though. Verse 12:9 still reminds us that we are not loving wisely or truly when we enable someone to sin or sin against us. There are great degrees of hostility. Enemies may be so dangerous that for you to have anything to do with them is to invite them to sin. In that case, the “good” you can do them is to stay away from them. See *Bold Love* by D.Allendar, which distinguishes between loving an evil person, a very foolish person, and a “normal” sinner.

b) Both the power *and* the model for this is, of course, the gospel. Christ died for us while we were his enemies. (Romans 5:6-10). That action is not only the paradigm for us, but the thought of it becomes our power to follow through. That is why Paul here reminds us of something very powerful — “leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘vengeance is mine... says the Lord” v.19. What we are being reminded is that all resentment and vengeance *is taking on God’s role as judge*. It is playing God. But (1) only God is qualified to be judge (we are imperfect and deserve judgment ourselves) and (2) only God knows enough to be judge (we don’t know all about the offender, what he/she has faced and deserves) and (3) Jesus took the judgment of God. So Paul is saying: “Think this! Either these persons you are angry at will repent some day and Jesus will take their judgment, or they will not and God will deal with it. But in either process, you are not involved.”

The gospel should make us remember that, if God decided to square all accounts with us, where would we be?

7. Look at the following list and do a personal inventory. Ask: a) In which 2 of these am I weakest? b) Where will I need them next (where will I be tested)? c) What practical steps can I take to strengthen myself in these two areas?

Love the unattractive people but with repentance and sincerity. v.9

Love but don’t make the person an idol who leads you to allow him/her to sin or you to sin. v.9

Love with dogged affection over the long haul, no matter what. Stay loyal. vv.10-12

Love by making people feel honored and valuable. Listen and show utmost consideration to those around you. v.10

Love by being generous in a practical way with your home, money, and time. v.13

Love without bitterness. Don't pay back or hold resentment against others. v.14

Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. v.15

Love with humility, Be willing to associate with people who are very different from you. v.16

Love by not avoiding hostile people, but planning appropriate kind and courteous words and deeds. v.21

Discuss students' answers.

TEACHING H

Underline and mark with a “!” any insight or thought that was illuminating or convicting.
Underline and mark with a “?” any insight or thought that was hard to understand.

Using the Gospel to forgive

A. The need for forgiveness

Resentment (i.e. bitterness, refusal to forgive) is an enormously dangerous condition. Its power can hide itself, like a “root” underground (Heb.12:15b), but it can not only “defile” and hurt many (Heb.12:15c), but it can keep us from actually receiving the grace of God (Heb.12:15a).

Why? Resentment requires a person to sit in the position of Judge (Rom.12:19-20). Now when we sit in judgment and condemnation of others, we forget our own sinfulness and weakness (“Let the one without sin cast the first stone” John 8:7.) Bitterness is the opposite of humility (cf. James 3:13-14- show it by... deeds done in humility... but if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition...) If we stay in a position of moral superiority, we cannot see our own lostness apart from the grace of Christ, and therefore Jesus ties our ability to forgive to our ability to repent. (“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” Matt.6:12.) This doesn’t mean that God forgives our sins because we forgive others. It means that to the degree we forgive others, we will repent to God — for both forgiving and repenting stem from an awareness of our sinfulness and deserved condemnation apart from the free mercy of God.

So bitterness has three dire results:

1. It keeps the bitter person in bondage, imprisoned in the painful past. (cf. Eph. 4:26-27. Do not let the sun go down on your anger; do not give the devil a foothold. Anger means you lose control and are influenced by other factors.) If you continue to be resentful toward a person, that person continues to affect and influence your behavior now. Your grudge gives them power over you.
2. It poisons relationships. (cf. Heb.12:15, growing up defiles many; and get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice).
3. It alienates us from God. (See above).

“Resentment is bittersweet. If we did not cherish it, we would let it go. What sort of rewards do we get from our resentment? Why do we keep score? First, it makes us feel superior to the person we resent. Also, it gives us an excuse for indulging in exquisite plots for revenge, such as hurting the person by withholding our ultimate treasure — personal friendship... Third, we chew the cud of past wrongs to enjoy the feeling of hurt that the memory kindles... There is a sense in which we remember past wounds to hurt ourselves. [Why?] We feel noble and worthy as the decent person who was wrongly hurt. Resentments serve a double purpose: they give us treasured pain, and they give us a chance to justify ourselves. So we get two rewards — a) neurotic pleasure, and b) religious pain. But we do, in fact, also hate resentment... It depresses us, robs us of gratitude, sneaks into other relationships...”

– Lewis Smedes, *Love within Limits*

"If you cannot free people from their wrongs... you enslave yourself to your own painful past, and by fastening yourself to the past, you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts.

– Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*

B. The nature of forgiveness

When someone has wronged you, it means they owe you, they have a debt with you. Forgiveness is to absorb the cost of the debt yourself. You pay the price yourself, and you refuse to exact the price out of the person in any way. Forgiveness is to, a) free the person from penalty for a sin by, b) paying the price yourself.

We are told that our forgiveness must imitate God's forgiveness in Christ. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph.4:32). a) How did God forgive? We are told that he does not 'remember' them. That cannot mean that God literally forgets what has happened — it means he "sends away" the penalty for them. He does not bring the incidents to mind, and does not let them affect the way he deals with us. b) How did God forgive "in Christ"? We are told that Jesus pays the price for the sins. "It is finished" means "It has been paid in full" (John 19:30).

"If a careless friend breaks a lamp at my home, I will forgive him. That means I will not make him buy a new lamp. I have set him free from the penalty of [the] sin... I... say, 'I release you from your debt...' But when the offender has walked away... we are not finished. We have dealt with the penalty, but the damage remains. There is still a price to be paid. The lamp is still broken... who will pay for it? I must pay for it myself.

A lamp is easy to price and pay for. But what about damage that is intangible, unpriceable... broken relationships? ruined reputations? [missed opportunities? [there are payments that can be made]."

– Dan Hamilton, *Forgiveness*

"Following Christ means walking the road he walked, and in order to forgive us He had to die... Forgiveness is relinquishment. It is a laying down... His follower may not refuse to relinquish his own right, his own territory, his own comfort... No one can take it from us, any more than anyone could take the life of Jesus if He had not laid it down of His own will. But we can do as He did. We can offer it up, writing off whatever loss it may entail, in the sure knowledge that the man who loses his life or his reputation or his 'face' or anything else for the sake of Christ will save it."

– Elizabeth Elliot, *As We Forgive Those*

"The verse [Is.43:25] concludes with an additional statement, 'and as for thy sins, I will not remember them'. As [our] transgressions have been blotted out, so they no longer can be seen [by God]. [He is saying this, in effect,] 'The things that you have done contrary to My law, I will not call to mind.'"

– E.J. Young, *Isaiah*, vol.3

C. Harder and easier forgiveness

There are basically two kinds of people to forgive — the repentant and the unrepentant.

1. The repentant

Jesus tells us to forgive a person who is repentant. In fact, if the person does not express repentance, and the sin is grievous, then we are to seek repentance from him or her. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him... (Luke 17:3-4).

When do we “rebuke”? It would be wrong to bring up every matter, and every time we have been treated unjustly or insensitively. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) means we are not to be so thin-skinned. However, we should seek repentance under two conditions:

- a) When the sin is serious enough to rupture the relationship. Matt.18:15 indicates that the purpose of such a rebuke is to “win your brother”. i.e. the maintenance of the relationship.
- b) When the sin is part of a pattern of behavior for the other person. Gal.6:1 (“if... caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual should restore”). A sin pattern is a habitual cast of characters which will in the end be harmful. In love it should be pointed out.

Why are we to seek repentance (“rebuke”)? We do it to restore the person. “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently...” (Gal.6:1). This is important! The purpose of rebuke is to restore a person who is “trapped” in a sin. Out of love we seek his or her healing. We do not rebuke in order to punish. We do not call persons to repentance for our sakes, but for theirs. It is not loving to allow a person to sin or confirm them in it. If we do not force ourselves

If the repentance comes, we are told to forgive “seventy time seven” (Matt.18:22), which is Jesus’ way to convey an infinite number. We are to forgive indefinitely.

Any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love, but a selfish desire to be loved. It says, “I’ll do anything to keep him or her loving me!” This is not loving the person — it is loving the love you get from the person. In other words, it is loving yourself more than the person. But true love is willing to confront, even to “lose” the beloved in the short run if there is a chance to help him or her.

“Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships... Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys. Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H.Gifford wrote: ‘Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.’ The fact is... anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.”

– Becky Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons*

2. The unrepentant

In many ways, the forgiveness of a repentant person is easy. Though we are not to seek “payment” from the person, a repentant person to some degree makes the payment by his or her very act of humility. They will admit wrong, and often seek to make restitution. (You should accept reasonable acts of restitution.) In such a case, they are taking much of the work of forgiveness away from you. There might be little “price payment” for you to do (see below, under “Methods”).

But we must also forgive unrepentant persons. Why?

Because it is commanded directly. Jesus says, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25). The direction is sweeping — anything against anyone. It says you are to do it even as you stand praying, not waiting for acts of repentance.

Why? Well, because the consequences of resentment and bitterness (see above under A.) will still imprison you and defile you in all the ways we mentioned. Therefore, you still must forgive. To forgive the unrepentant takes far more self-control and discipline (see below under E.5.)

But an additional problem arises with people who will not admit their injustices and who may even be continuing their unjust and harmful behavior. What if the persons wronging us have done something illegal? What if what they have done could be told to someone in authority in your company, to put the record straight? What if there is something to do which could check or stop the behavior of the unrepentant person? Does forgiveness mean we should do nothing?

No, we must seek justice, though not revenge. The Bible teaches us that we are to stand up for justice and truth in the world. To not do so is cowardice.

“I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The one who was dying blessed me and I made the widow’s heart sin. I put on righteousness as my clothing and justice was my robe and turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy and took up the case of the alien. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.” Job 29:12-17

What does it mean to have “justice as my robe and turban?” Job says that he demanded justice for the single mother, the immigrant, and others who were being denied their rights by others. He stood up against unjust business practices and corrupt court systems, etc. We are not to allow justice and truth to go trampled upon. Why? It is not only not loving for the people being hurt, but it is not loving to the offenders to allow them to go on in sin.

But someone will protest, “but what about ‘turn the other cheek’?” This statement by Jesus (in Matt.6:38-42) discusses our attitudes in personal relationships. Jesus is not saying that Christians are not to stand up for truth. (Paul (Acts 16) and even Jesus himself (John 18:22,23) protested illegal proceedings.) Rather, Jesus is teaching that our rebukes of people and our seeking of justice must not be a personal seeking of revenge, a personal seeking to redress our suffering by bringing suffering upon the offender. We are to forgive personally, and then pursue justice.

Jesus is calling us to a radically different spirit. Most people cannot distinguish seeking justice from seeking revenge. They either seek justice to seek revenge, or they seek neither. But Jesus is calling us to forgive personally, to not be concerned with our image and ego and “loss of face”, and yet to be concerned with truth and out of love to check the violator’s behavior pattern. This is a mighty concept, an incredible balance.

D. Some things forgiveness is not

It is helpful to distinguish forgiveness from some things which are often mistaken for it.

1. Forgiveness is not excusing. A good excuse only eliminates the need for forgiveness. If it is a valid explanation, it shows the person does not owe us. If an excuse is valid, it means that, though we have been hurt, the person is not the cause, and therefore does not owe the price. Therefore, also —
2. Forgiveness is not a denial. Some people think that forgiveness means we create and excuse that we know is not exactly true. Or that forgiveness is simply denying that one is really hurt or that we have lost anything. No, forgiveness is not pretending a sin is not a sin. It is not denial or pretense that it did not happen. In fact, forgiveness starts by making a full measure of the debt and the cost. The price cannot be paid unless it is reckoned.
3. Forgiveness is not merely a refraining from active revenge. Many say, “I forgive but I cannot forget.” That usually means, “I won’t actively seek to harm you now, but I will treat you with coldness and root for you to fail and fall, because you still owe me.” Forgiveness is canceling the debt — NOT merely waiting for the person pay it back in smaller installments.
4. Forgiveness is not suspended judgment. It is possible to say, “I’ll forgive you this time, but next time I’ll clobber you.” That means: “I am counting this against you, but it is not enough for full revenge yet. But I am keeping it in your account you are own probation.”
5. Forgiveness is not ‘controlling mercy’. There is a way to say “I forgive you” which is really a proud way of rubbing the other person’s nose into it. It is a way to say, “look how much better I am than you — I am overlooking this!” In addition, we can say, “since I have forgiven you, I expect a whole lot out of you.” That, of course, is the very opposite of forgiveness! You are actually saying, “you owe me a lot of bowing and scraping, since I did not go after revenge.” That is a form of revenge.
6. Forgiveness does not mean to decline pursuit of justice. (See above C.2.) People tend to either seek both justice and revenge (actually, they seek justice to revenge), or neither justice or revenge. One is vindictiveness, and the other cowardice.
7. Forgiveness is not the same as re-trusting. Until a person shows evidence of true change, we should not trust the person. To immediately re-trust a person with sinful habits could actually be enabling him or her to sin. Trust must be restored, and the speed at which this occurs depends on the repentance of the offender. But we can still forgive and “repay with good” (see below).

E. The method of forgiveness

How do we actually forgive?

1. Distinguish between granting and feeling.

Before we can even proceed, we need to realize that forgiveness is granted (often for a long time) before it is felt. Forgiveness is granted first, and felt later (Luke 17:3-10). Forgiveness is not primarily a feeling, but a set of actions and disciplines. In summary, forgiveness is a promise not to exact the price of the sin from the person who wronged you. This promise means a repeated set of "payment" in which you relinquish revenge. It is hard and (for a while) constant. If this promise is kept actively, eventually the feeling of anger subsides.

It is critical to realize at the outset, then, that forgiveness is not the forcing or denying of feelings, but a promise to make and to keep despite our feelings.

2. Assess the cost and let the facts stand as history.

Some people do not need to spend much time on this! But we must mention it because some people habitually deal with wrongs by denying how much they have hurt. They try to avoid revenge by saying, "well, this didn't really hurt! I'm too strong for that!" But that is denial. It is a way to avoid the hard work of forgiveness. You cannot forgive someone unless you admit what was done. Add up what the person has really taken from you. Recognize how you were hurt. (If you need to confront the offender you will need to be able to make a sober estimate of the damage.)

3. Separate the evil-doer from evil and will his or her redemption.

Notice that on the cross Jesus says, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) He doesn't actually say "I forgive you". He does forgive, of course, but by turning to the Father and praying for them, he shows us an important method of forgiveness. He admits that they are sinning (otherwise they would not need forgiveness!) but he sees them as needy and weak (they don't know). He seeks their enlightenment and forgiveness from God. He prays for them.

When we identify "evil" too closely with the "evildoer", we get pulled into the same cycle of hurt pride and revenge and self-absorption and then more hurt pride and more revenge. The secret of overcoming evil is for us to see "evil" as something above and distinct from the evil doer. When we do that, there are two results: 1) The spread of evil is checked toward us. Its hatred and pride does not infect us, and 2) the spread of evil may be checked in the evildoer. He or she may be softened and helped by our love.

This is, then, an act of the will. We determine to wish them good and will their growth and healing. We determine to pray for them.

4. Determine to never exact the price, but to pay the price ourselves.

"[Forgiveness] is to deal with our emotions by sending them away — by denying ourselves the dark pleasures of venting them or fondling them in our minds...

"Once upon a time, I was engaged to a young woman who changed her mind. I forgave her... but [only] in small sums over a year... [They were made] whenever I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past, whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity, whenever [I saw her] with another man, whenever I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments — but she never saw them. And her own payment were unseen by me... but I do know that she forgave me... [Forgiveness] is more than a matter of refusing to hate someone. It is also a matter of choosing to demonstrate love and acceptance to the offender... Pain is the consequence of sin; there is no easy way to deal with it. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness, the love that heals."

– Dan Hamilton, *Forgiveness*

This quote shows us that there are numerous ways that we can "exact" and take payment from the offender, but each time we refrain, we are absorbing the cost ourselves and "making payments". Below are the ways in which we tend to try to exact payments:

In our dealing with the offender:

- (1) We can make cutting remarks and drag out the past.
- (2) We can be far more demanding and controlling with the person than we are with others, all because "they owe us".
- (3) We can punish with self-righteous "mercy" which makes them feel small.
- (4) We can avoid them, be cold or to them in overt and/or subtle ways.
- (5) We can actively seek and scheme to hurt or harm them, taking from them something valuable to them.

In our dealing with others:

- (1) We can run them down to others, under the guise of "warning" people about them.
- (2) We can run them down to others, under the guise of seeking sympathy and sharing our hurt.

In our dealing with ourselves:

- (1) We can replay the tapes of what they did to us, to justify our anger and hostility.
- (2) We can "root" for their failure or fall or pain.

Forgiveness is a promise, to not "bring the matter up" to the person, others, or even ourselves. At each point when we are tempted to exact payment, we refuse, and though it hurts, that is a payment:

With the person

In our dealings with the person we are courteous and warm as possible. If the person is

repentant, we seek to restore the relationship as much as possible. Why say “as much as possible?” If the person has done grievous wrong, it may mean the trust can only be restored in degrees. If the person is continuing in a hostile manner, you must not make it easy for them to sin against you. And there are other circumstances. (e.g. If the person is a former “love interest”, then to re-create the same relationship may be inappropriate.)

The speed and degree of this restoration entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved. Part of real repentance usually means asking: “what could I do that would make you trust me?” and being willing to accept the answer. Part of real forgiveness means being open to the possibility of lasting change in the offender and being truly unbiased and willing to offer more trust little by little.

With others

We must not criticize the offender to others. We should be careful, when seeking support for our “burdens” (Galatians 6:1-6) that we aren’t using them as an excuse to get others to justify us by agreeing how horrible the other person is! We must be reasonable. This is not to say you can never say anything that casts a bad light on someone else, but you must watch your motives. If the person stays in a hostile and unrepentant mode, it may be necessary to “warn” someone about him or her, but again, motives must be watched.

With yourself

What does it mean to “not bring it up yourself?” It means not to dwell on it in the heart, and not to re-play the “videotapes” of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you. It means, when you are ready to do so, you should pray for the person and yourself, remind yourself of the cross (see below) and turn your mind to other things.

5. Fill the mind with the gospel motives for forgiveness.

a) Think of Jesus as Savior.

The Bible is explicit in telling us to forgive as God in Christ forgave you (Eph.4:32). And it is impossible to do forgiveness without continually melting the heart with a knowledge of the gospel.

Jesus himself shows us vividly how to do this in Matthew 18:21-35. When Peter asks about forgiveness, Jesus tells the parable of a servant who is forgiven a debt of an infinite sum (10,000 talents — roughly equivalent to about \$300,000,000 dollars) but who then refuses to forgive a debt to him of a few dollars. Jesus calls the servant “wicked” and says, in effect, to him, “shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?”(18:33) This is a challenge to us. We must compare our debt to God with people’s debts to us AND we are to compare his Christ’s payment for our forgiveness to our payment for their forgiveness. We are to say, “Lord, you did not exact payment for my debts from me, but Jesus paid for them with his life. Now what

right to I have to exact payments for their debts to me? And for me to forgive would not take a payment anything like Christ's payment!"

When we think of God's gracious gift to us, it inspires a spirit of love and forgiveness.

"Love alone has the power to release memory's grip on yesterday's evil, for only love is the power that moves us toward people without expectation of return and therefore with a great tolerance for hurt. Love does not demand explanations and apologies or keep accounts. Love does not take pleasure in remembering how much we have coming from people who hurt us. For love is the power whose only direction is the help, healing, and salvation of the other person."

– Lewis Smedes, *Love within Limits*

b) Think of God as judge.

Paul in Romans 12 shows us another way to think of resentment and forgiveness. He says, "Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: 'vengeance is mine...says the Lord' v.19. What we are being reminded is that all resentment and vengeance is taking on God's role as judge. It is playing God. But (1) only God is qualified to be judge (we are imperfect and deserve judgment ourselves) and (2) only God knows enough to be judge (we don't know all about the offender, what he/she has faced and deserves) and (3) Jesus took the judgment of God. So Paul is saying: "Think this! Either these persons you are angry at will repent some day and Jesus will take their judgment, or they will not and God will deal with it. But in either process, you are not involved."

"Pride won't allow forgiveness; forgiveness won't allow pride". If you cannot forgive, it is because you are sure that you are not as sinful as the person you are mad at.

6. If necessary, look for inordinate loves

Anger is the result of love. It is energy for defense of something you love when it is threatened. If you don't love something at all, you are not angry when it is threatened. If you love something a little, you get a little angry when it is threatened. Then, if something you love is an "ultimate concern", if it is something that gives you meaning in life, then when it is threatened you will get enormously angry.

As we saw in Teaching D (on Idolatry), when something becomes more important than God, it becomes a defining factor, an "idol of the heart". When such a thing is threatened, your anger is uncontrollable. Your anger is the way the idol keeps you in its service.

Therefore, if you find that, despite all the efforts to forgive (using 0 – 4 above), your anger and bitterness cannot subside, you may need to look deeper and ask, "what am I defending? what is so important that I cannot live without?" It may be that, until some inordinate desire is identified and confronted, you will not be able to master your anger.

APPENDIX

If there seems to be a rupture in a relationship between you and another Christian, consider the following “tracks” to reconciliation. [Note: These Biblical tracks are for relating to Christians, though much of their wisdom can be applied across the board.]

Matthew 5 Track (When you are not sure what the problem is, and you think that perhaps the person has been offended by your behavior.)

1. Examine yourself for any ways in which, by omission or commission you may have contributed to the problem.
2. Pray and practice what you will say.
3. Go prepared to speak of your sin and your responsibility first.
4. Begin: “It appears to me you there is a problem between us; am I wrong? Please tell me what you think I have contributed to it.” Or “Here is what I know I have contributed to the problem — where I have done wrong. Now could you tell me what else I have done that I have not seen?”
5. Respond:
 - a) Admit and ask forgiveness anything the person says that is just. Even if there are exaggerations, extract the real fault and confess it. Even if only 10% of the problem is you, admit it. Provide plans for changing behavior. Ask if there is anything to do to restore trust. AND/OR
 - b) Explain. If after humble self-examination, there are some things mentioned you really do not think you can honestly confess as sins, after you have repented, give some explanation of the other accusations. Then say, “Can you accept my point of view?”
6. After this, you may need to use Matt 18 track, but often it is better to wait and see if your Scriptural approach doesn’t elicit confession from the other without you having to extract it.

Matthew 18 Track When the person has wronged you, or in some other way is ‘caught’ in a trespass (Gal.6).

1. Pray and practice what you will say.
2. Begin, if possible, with a confession of anything you contributed to the problem.
3. Begin: “This is how it looks to me. From my point of view you did this... this... and it effected [me or someone else] this way... this way... I am coming to ask you if my understanding is accurate or distorted. Correct me if I am wrong. Could you explain what happened?” Be sure your list of things he/she has done is specific, not vague. Have a loving and humble tone. Attack the problem not the person (e.g. Not “You are so thoughtless”, but “you have continually forgotten this after repeated promises”).
4. Suggest alternatives and solutions for alternative courses of action or behavior. Make sure all criticism is constructive.
5. Offer forgiveness, but avoid using the term unless asked for!

Romans

New relationships: The world

Study 21 | Romans 13:1-14

Summary

13:1-7 – Relationship to the state

- vv.1-4 The responsibilities of the state
- vv.1-2 Its authority, but only from God
- vv.3-4 Its ministry: to promote the good and to restrain the evil
- vv.5-7 The responsibilities of Christian citizens
- v.5 Subjection
- vv.6-7 Dues
- v.7b Respect and honor

13:8-14 – Relationship to the world

- vv.8-10 Love for the people of the world
- v.8 The obligation of neighbor love
- vv.9-10 The guidelines of neighbor love
- vv.11-14 Hatred for the spirit of the world
- vv.11-12a The overlap of the ages
- vv.12b-14 Living in the age to come

Introduction: It is important to recognize in this section that Paul is not giving us a discussion of church-state relations, but rather he is giving instruction to individual Christians about their personal citizenship. He is not addressing either a) civil magistrates or even b) Christian civil magistrates. (There weren't any at the time!) So Paul is not laying out specific answers that address the thorny problems of church-and-state which have troubled us for centuries. But there are some interesting inferences we can draw.

“Relations between church and state have been notoriously controversial throughout the Christian centuries. To oversimplify, four main models have been tried — Erastianism (the state controls the church), theocracy (the church controls the state), Constantinianism (the compromise in which the state favors the church and the church accommodates to the state in order to retain its [favored status], and partnership (church and state recognize and encourage each other's distinct God-given responsibilities in a spirit of constructive collaboration.) The fourth seems to accord best with Paul's teaching in Romans 13”

– John Stott, *Romans*

1. vv.1-7 What reasons does Paul give in verses 1-7 why it is right to submit to the authority of the civil government?

First, Paul says to *because it is right*. He says God invented the state, the civil government. v.1c “The authorities that exist have been established by God.” This certainly means that a) civil governments in general are the institution of God, and therefore deserve respect and submission. But Paul may also mean that, b) the individuals who are ruling and exercising authority are in their positions by God’s “providential” control of all history. Daniel 4:17 says God rules over all human governments and “gives them to whoever he wishes.” Thus Christians are to submit, because of conscience (v.5) — in other words, from a recognition of the role God has given the state.)

Second, Paul says to *because it is wise*. He says that God designed human society in this fashion. “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right... for he is God’s servant to do you good...” (vv.3-4). Paul is saying that human beings need government to hold people accountable to live in a way that makes it possible for people to live together. Without the threat of punishment, human self-interest would make society impossible. So the very system of human government is a wise one.

One way in which we see the practicality of government is in v.4: “He does not bear the sword for nothing.” “The sword” is clearly the power to punish those who do wrong with civil sanctions (fines, imprisonment, death, etc.) Imagine how chaotic it would be if every citizen “bore the sword!” We know of places and times in which that was the case, and no one wants to live under such circumstances. God’s plan is that only some people can bear the sword — we cannot all do it. In summary, we submit so government can work. If we don’t submit, there is no possibility for social order.

Perhaps there is a third reason. Paul says to *because it is fair*. Paul seems to be indicating that governing is hard work. *This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing*. Give everyone what you owe him. (vv.6-7) We are obliged to give them what we owe them. Since they do their part, we must do ours.

2. vv.1-7 How absolute is the state’s power over us? What indication is there in the text that the authority of the state has limits? What indication do you know of elsewhere in the Bible regarding limits to this authority?

Certainly, at first sight, Paul seems to put the requirement of submission in absolute terms. “He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted” (v.2). And the strength of this statement becomes greater when we realize Paul was talking of a very non-Christian government — the pagan Roman empire.

“What [Paul] writes is specially remarkable when we recall that at that time there were no Christian authorities (global, regional, or local). On the contrary they were Roman and Jewish, and were therefore largely unfriendly and even hostile to the

church. Yet Paul regarded them as having been established by God, who required Christians to submit to them and cooperate with them.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

Within this very passage however, there are some hints that this authority is not absolute. By “hints” we mean there are some statements with implications that can be drawn out, though they are not explicitly stated in this particular chapter of the Bible:

Hint #1: “Give everyone what you owe him” (v.7)... “if taxes... revenue... respect... honor.” This is a very clear echo of Jesus famous saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mt.22:21) Paul surely has in mind this teaching of Jesus, who is clearly saying that the civil magistrate has a limited sphere of authority. Jesus was undercutting a very common conception of the state in antiquity. Namely, the king or emperor *was* a deity in the pantheon, or so closely allied with the god of the region that the state had a divine authority. Jesus however says, “yes” to paying Caesar taxes but “no” to paying Caesar worship, i.e. *unqualified* obedience. This statement of Jesus sank very deeply into the consciousness of the early church. Not only does Paul echo it here in v.7, but Peter does in I Pet. 2:17. Christians got into a great deal of trouble in the Roman Empire when it was realized that they had a higher authority than the emperor, by which they could judge him and the civil government. [Note: When the Stuart kings of Britain claimed the “divine right of kings,” the Protestant minister Samuel Rutherford wrote a treatise against the idea called *Lex Rex* — “Law is King.” That is the Biblical teaching — the King is not the Law, but Law (God’s law) is the King!]

Hint #2: “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right” (v.3)... “he is God’s servant to do you good” (v.4). Since the civil magistrate is “God’s *servant*,” that clearly implies an accountability to operate under God’s moral order. A servant is not free to do whatever he or she wishes. (Simba: “I thought being a king meant you can do whatever you want!” Mufasa: “There’s more to being a king than that!”) Also, if they are to support the doing of “right,” that would mean that they must not require the doing of “wrong” — that which is disobedient to God’s moral order. But this is only a “hint,” an implicit implication of Paul’s statement. In Acts 5:29, Peter makes the principle explicit: “We must obey God, rather than men!” Peter and the rest of the apostles at that point are announcing to the Sanhedrin their disobedience of the ordinance against the preaching of the Gospel. So the Bible gives a very clear basis for civil disobedience, namely — *if the state commands what God forbids, or if the state forbids what God commands, then civil disobedience is a Christian duty.*

Sum: The Biblical teaching on the state is (as usual) very penetrating and unique.

1. On the one hand, you have examples of believers submitting to and supporting civil authorities that themselves were disobedient to God’s word and often punished the good. Two examples are Joseph (who was a kind of Prime Minister of Egypt) and Jeremiah (who counseled Judah to surrender to and be supportive of a pagan and cruel Babylonian civil power.) See question #3 for more on Jeremiah. Christians are not to show disrespect or undermine the authority of even a government which is

foolish and which *supports* behavior that is disobedient to God. (The Roman government of which Paul is speaking certainly did that.)

2. On the other hand, you also have examples of believers who courageously disobey and oppose civil authority when it *requires* behavior of its citizens that is disobedient to God. The classic Biblical example of this is Daniel and his associates. On the one hand, Daniel followed the counsel of Jeremiah (27-29) to be actively involved in civic affairs, even of a pagan society. But when citizens were commanded to do what was forbidden (idol worship — Daniel 3:4ff), or forbidden to do what was commanded (prayer to the Lord — Dan.6:7), then the believers disobeyed the state and submitted to the punishment (yet with still a kind of fearless respect (!) — see Dan.3:16-18). Another example is the civil disobedience of the Hebrew midwives, who did not kill the infant boys as Pharaoh decreed (Exodus 1:17), reminding us of those who hid Jews in defiance of the government during World War II.

3. vv.1-7. a) What is the “job description” of the state — its purposes and functions? b) What is the “job description” of the Christian citizen?

a) First, the negative function of the state — it is to punish wrongdoing. “he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant... to bring punishment...” (v.4). There is a complete consensus by all Christians (and by most everyone else) that there can be no civil order unless the state punishes wrongdoing. Murder, theft, various forms of lying and fraud, etc., are universally seen as undermining any peaceful and harmonious society. There is some difference of opinion about what Paul is saying about the nature of those punishments. The “sword,” though, probably means the power to inflict penalties up to and including death (in war and capital punishment). That is the fairest way to read Paul’s words, for previously when he uses the word “sword” (Romans 8:35) it means “death,” and that was the normal meaning of the word in the usage of the time (Acts 12:2; Rev.13:10).

[Note: It would be very easy for the group to enter a broad discussion of the merits and problems of capital punishment. That is not a fair use of time here, because Romans 13 does not give us much to go on about this subject. The word “sword” at *least* means the right to use force and arms, but we cannot prove from this particular text the validity of capital punishment. A much better text to study on the subject is Genesis 9:1-9.]

Secondly, the positive function of the state — it is “for the good.” The state is God’s servant (literally) “to you for the good.” (The NIV translation says is “to *do* you good” but the word “do” is not in Paul’s original Greek text.) The problem is this: Paul says that the state is to *punish* evil *behavior*. (He defines “evil” as behavior, and he defines the state’s function toward it as “punishment.”) But when Paul speaks of “the good,” he is not as specific. Of course, he says the state is to be “for” the good! But he doesn’t say exactly what “the good” is (good behavior? good conditions?), nor does he say how the state is to function toward it (to reward it? to promote it?)

Some interpreters think that Paul is not talking about a second function of the state at all. Rather, he is simply saying the very same thing in v.4a and in v.4b in two different ways. In other words, this view says the state promotes the good *by* punishing evil behavior. Thus “the good” is merely the good behavior of citizens, and Paul means: “the state serves you by bringing you to behave rightly through the deterrence of its punishment.” That interpretation accords with a view that government should be extremely limited, doing only law enforcement and national defense. That is a possible rendering, because the next clause says, “if you do wrong...” so maybe the “good” is simply the citizens behavior.

However, it is not likely that each clause is talking about the very same identical function. v.4b begins with “but”; it does not start with “namely” or “in other words.” Surely normal usage of such grammar means that two *different* but *opposite* activities are being discussed. So even if “the good” only means good citizen behavior, it must mean that the state rewards and promotes that behavior with some kind of activity besides the penalizing and punishing of v.4b. It would mean that the state should at least find ways to praise right behavior and relationships, to encourage and “foster virtue and service” (Stott). In addition, some believe that Paul is saying that the state is promoting “the good” not just *of* the individual but *for* the individual. That may mean promoting the general economic, social, cultural, physical welfare of people by a variety of means. Such an interpretation, of course, increases the scope of what the government can do.

Sum: Maybe, since Paul left “the good” undefined, he meant for us to think of it broadly. So perhaps the most natural rendering is this: “the state both promotes and rewards ‘the good’ (right behavior and relationships), and also restrains and punishes ‘the evil’ (wrong behavior and relationships).” So Romans 13 rules out the extremes of either extremely limited or very powerful government, of either totalitarianism or libertarianism.

b) Our job description includes:

1. **Submission** (v.5a). This of course means that we must *obey* the state. We have discussed this above. Under this heading are included taxes, a very practical issue, and perhaps an obvious thing to say. But it would be easy for a Christian to read that we are citizens of heaven (Phil.3:20) and infer from that that we should not vote, pay taxes, serve in office, etc. Paul here is clearly saying that this is not the case.
2. **Because of conscience** (v.5c). This means that we must *evaluate* the state. Others may obey only for fear of punishment (v.5b). This is very significant! To obey out of a fear of punishment is obedience out of self-interest, and that will lead you astray. On the one hand, self-interest can lead to too little submission to the state, because you will probably disobey when there’s no prospect of punishment. On the other hand, fear of punishment could very easily lead you to too much submission to the state, because you will do things immoral “just because I was taking orders.”

Paul's radical principle is: "We obey our government out of our Christian conscience, out of our obedience to God alone." This is radical, for it cuts two ways. On the one hand we will obey the state even when there's no civil consequences, because our motivation is obedience to the God who established the state. On the other hand, we can never submit uncritically to what the state tells us. If it requires us to violate our conscience, we must disobey.

"Conscience is a powerful reinforcement of the outward directions to submit to the state. But once conscience is brought in, there is a limit: what is against conscience cannot be done... Conscience at one and the same time obliges us to be obedient and sets a limit to that obedience."

– Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*

3. **Respect... honor** (v.7). This simply means that we are to not only comply with civil authorities, but do so in a way that shows them respect and honor and courtesy. This is the same issue we face in the family and the church. We are to treat parents, ministers, and civil magistrates with deference. Even when the individuals in the positions are not worthy of much respect, we show respect to the authority structure itself that stands under and behind them.

4. In what practical ways do Christians in this country today especially need to heed and apply these principles for understanding and relating to our government?

This is an opinion question, of course — but here are a couple of possible applications:

Christians need to give even pagan governors calm, qualified respect.

- A. **Respect.** We must grant respect for those in authority, whether they represent our views or not. For example, Jeremiah tells the Israelites that "my servant, Nebuchadnezzar" (v.6), a pagan king, will be in charge of that part of the world, and "if any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar... I will punish that nation..." (27:1-11).
- B. **Calm.** Also, Christians don't get hysterical and fearful over the actions of civil magistrates who don't represent our views. Why? Because when God allows pagans to be in power, he does not forget justice — "All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him" (27:7). So there is not to be the angry hostility that comes from anxiety. There is no "he's got to be stopped!" After all, though unwitting about it, he is "God's servant." He cannot thwart God's plan — even his unbelief and violence plays into God's hand.
- C. **Qualified.** But since God is judge, we know that the pagan king and his city is also under judgment and will be judged if there is no repentance (v.7). So our respect, though calm, is qualified, not lavish and fawning.

Christians need to be wary of extreme ideological views of the role of government. On the one hand, it is hard to support from the Bible the very conservative view that government should do nothing but basic law enforcement. On the other hand, the Bible cannot support the very liberal/socialist view of the “government-as-savior.”

Christians should be more willing to participate fully in civic life. Romans 13 overall gives a very positive view of the role of the government. When Paul in v.7 talks of paying taxes and providing “revenue,” he is inviting Christians into full participation in the public life of the whole citizenry. (See the next question.)

5. vv. 8-10 Why does vv.8-10 follow vv.5-7? How are they related?

It is easy to interpret vv.8-10 in a very individualistic way, as simply teaching us to love our neighbor. The section on the state (13:1-7) is wedged between the commands to love our enemy (12:17-21) and to love our neighbor (13:8-10). Is this just a random stringing together of subjects? Did Paul just “stick” his talk on the state between these two sections or is there a connection?

First look at the connection between 12:17-21 and 13:1-7. When Paul commands us to “overcome evil with good” (12:21) and *then* goes on to talk about our involvement in society, he is saying that Christians *are to overcome the evil of our society by doing good (deeds of compassion and generosity) and by living good in the full view of the citizenry.* Now look at the connection between 13:1-7 and 8-10. In v.7 he says “give everyone what you owe” (v.7), and he is talking of the state specifically, for he refers to taxes and respect. But v.8 also speaks of paying what we owe everyone, yet now Paul has shifted to the whole body of our neighbors — all the citizens we live with. Thus Paul is calling us not simply to participate in the state, but in public and civic life in general. In our neighborhoods and communities, and city, *Christians are to become great doers of “good” in their community.*

Are there any examples in the Bible of this “overcoming evil with good” in a corporate way? Yes — Jeremiah calls the exiles in Babylon to overcome evil by seeking the prosperity of their city. When Jeremiah wrote a letter to the Babylonian exiles, they were staying in an enclave unto themselves, and refusing to participate in the “unclean” pagan city. Jeremiah *does* say that there will be a judgment (27:7) if the city does not repent, and thus the Israelites should not close their eyes to its wickedness. Yet the Israelites are to become involved with the city and seek its peace and prosperity. They are not to compromise with pagan values, but they are to be gloriously positive toward the city. He tells them: a) to build homes and settle down (v.5) (invest in the community); b) to marry and have sons and daughters (v.6a); and c) to increase in number, do not decrease (v.6b) (don’t lose your identity); d) to seek “shalom” of the city (pursue its overall harmony and prosperity); and e) pray to the Lord for it. So Jeremiah is telling believers to “overcome evil with good” by bringing their love and faith to bear on the public good of the city in which they live.

6. vv.8-10, a) How does Paul define love? b) How does this answer the person who says, “obedience to the rules of the law is not important — only love is?”

a) In v.9 he says: “the commandments... are summed up in... love your neighbor...” In other words, God’s law is God’s guidelines on how to love others. So here he is saying, *the laws are really just “love-lines.”* Then Paul reverses things and says also (literally) that *love IS fulfilling the law* (v.10). He defines love as scrupulously obeying God’s law in one’s relationship with one’s neighbor. So he is also saying, *love is really just following the law*. In other words, Paul refuses to pit love and law against each other — the obedient thing is the loving thing, the loving thing is the obedient thing!

b) Now modern people don’t see it this way. In the short-run, it often seems that the loving thing to do is to break the law. For example, often we know that the truth will hurt someone, so we lie. But Paul is warning us not to think we are wiser than God in determining what will hurt or help someone. Usually, when we talk about the “loving thing” we mean the “comfortable thing,” that which will give the person the least disturbance or distress. The point of love is to do no harm (v.10). But only God knows what we need ultimately. He built our souls and hearts and he knows what we need. The law therefore is God’s way of saying, “you want to do your neighbor ‘no harm’? Well, here’s how! Follow these guidelines, not your instincts or wisdom.” Thus disobeying God’s law is never simple disobedience! Every sin is also: a) an assault on God’s wisdom and b) a failure of love.

Law and love are often thought to be incompatible. And there are significant differences between them, law being often negative (‘you shall not’) and love positive, law relating to particular sins and love being a comprehensive principle. But the advocates of the ‘new morality’ or ‘situation ethics’... insist that now... ‘love is the end of the law’ because law is no longer needed. Love [supposedly] ...discerns intuitively what a true respect for persons will demand in each situation. But this expresses a naive confidence in love’s infallibility. The truth is that love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard... Paul wrote not that ‘love is the end of the law’, but that ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’. Law and love need each other. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

7. vv.11-14 What practical advice does Paul give us here for self-control?

1. *We must “understand the present time”* (v.11). We must keep our perspective. What is the nature of the present time? “The night is nearly over, the day is almost here” (v.12a). Paul is saying that this world will not go on much longer, that the eternal world will break in anytime now. Many people think Paul was simply mistaken, that judgment day did not come as soon as he thought! But that is to miss the point. The point is: *we are to realize the brevity of this life, the transitory and ephemeral nature of this world.* We are to build our lives on eternal things, the things that last — truth, God, love, righteousness. (Actually, you don’t even have to be a

Christian to suddenly get a vision of the fleeting nature of this world. Many non-Christians who have nearly died suddenly find that their priorities get a profound re-arrangement! Well, Christians are to always live with this perspective.)

2. *We must put on the armor of light* (v.12b) "...let us behave... as in the daytime..." Paul says that we must work out the implications of this perspective for our behavior. We must behave as in the daytime. This takes imagination and reflection! We are to imagine that the "day has dawned" and that Jesus is right before us. Now, how would I behave? What is really eternally important? What will last forever?

You must clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (v.14). This is a strong metaphor. There is one sense, of course, in which we have already "put on Christ" (Gal.3:27; Rom.6:3) in that we are legally righteous before God. We are legally "in him," "covered with him." We've seen this throughout the book of Romans. But the context indicates that this means that we have to *live* as if we are clothed in him. For example, if a man is in a tuxedo or a woman in long gown and heels, it has an effect upon their behavior. You look in the mirror and you see yourself dressed for an occasion of high dignity and formality, so you behave accordingly. If you forget, and move about and act as if you are in jogging clothes, you will look silly (and you will probably damage your clothes!). Work the illustration out for Christian living. We are supposed to remember "who we are wearing," what he did for us, what he wanted for us, what it cost him. This is much like Romans 6, in which we are told "you are dead to sin" and then told "now *act* dead to sin!" Remember who you are!

Romans

New relationships: To the weak

Study 22 | Romans 14:1-23

Summary

14:1-3 The basic principle

- v.1a Welcome those with whom you differ
- v.1b Don't condemn others over matters which God has not clearly forbidden
- vv.2-3 Because God has accepted you all

14:4-13a- Criticism of the weak

- v.4 Don't judge; you are not the judge
- v.5 Be convinced in your own mind
- vv.6-8 We are responsible ultimately to our Lord in these matters
- vv.9-12 Jesus alone has a right to be Lord of our conscience

14:13b-21 Criticism of the strong

- v.13 Don't lead someone else to stumble
- v.14 even though your position is right
- v.15 Live in love
- v.16 Don't let your liberty do evil
- vv.17-18 For the kingdom of God is not about these issues
- 14:22-23 Summary
- vv.22-23 Don't violate the conscience, but educate the conscience

Introduction: This study will require the leader to provide some background teaching.

In chapters 1-11 Paul has explained the gospel: that we are just in God's sight by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. Therefore we are simultaneously sinful, yet completely righteous and perfect in his sight. If we fully understand the gospel (chapters 1-5) and experience the gospel (chapters 6-8), the result will be a life of grateful, joyous love. So starting in chapter 12, Paul begins to describe this life of love which transforms our relationships with ourselves, other Christians, and the world, both with friends and enemies.

Now, in chapter 14 he has an opportunity to apply all he has been saying to a very specific case — a problem within the Roman congregation. He is saying, "OK, now — let me show you how it applies to the very problem you are having there."

1. vv.2-3, 5, 14, 20-21 What are the differences of opinion between the 'strong' and the 'weak'?

Verses 2-3 say the dispute had to do with eating. Some felt that as Christians, they could not eat meat.

Verse 5 indicates that some felt that they had to observe certain days as holy. In Col.2:16 Paul speaks of Christians who still held to Jewish/Old Testament feast days. That could very well be what is in view here.

Verses 14 and 20 indicate that some believed certain foods were "unclean." This is a clear reference to Old Testament ceremonial laws about "clean" and "unclean" foods (See, for example, Lev.11 and Deut.14). These were part of the Old Testament regulations which qualified or disqualified you as fit for entering worship in the tabernacle or temple. Some of the people still followed the Old Testament dietary laws of kosher, etc.

Verse 21 indicates the drinking of wine seems to also have been a "scruple." Some Christians evidently felt that believers should not drink at all.

What was the problem? It is interesting to compare this dispute to the one described in I Corinthians 8. That was a conflict between ex-idol worshippers and other believers over whether Christians could buy and eat meat left over after pagan temple services. In that situation, the "strong" would have been Christians who said, "there's nothing wrong with eating it — idols aren't real." Thus the 'strong' probably were mainly Jewish Christians who had no background in idol worship. The "weak" would have been former idolaters (mainly Gentiles) who had once been entrapped in the pagan cults and now felt polluted when having anything to do with it. But here it appears that the roles are reversed. The "weak" are those who are following the Old Testament "clean-unclean" laws (14:2,3, 14,20), and who feel polluted when unclean meats are eaten or other Old Testament regulations are broken.

Some ask: "are these the 'Judaizers' of Galatians, who insisted that it was still necessary to obey the Old Testament law in order to be saved?" The answer must be, "No." Paul refused to consider such people Christians at all (Gal.1:8). He did not merely call them "weak in faith." Therefore we have something different here. These are Christians accustomed to certain customs of eating and observance based on the Old Testament, and they have begun to look down on Christians who don't join them in such practices. Now Paul rather carefully avoids saying that all Jewish Christians are weak! Why? Many Gentiles, called "God-fearers" had also been part of synagogues before converting to Christianity. They too could have been "weak" in this sense.

2. v.3 What do you think is a "weak in faith" Christian? Why does Paul refer to someone like this as "weak?"

In v.3 Paul says, "the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him." Here Paul shows that the "weak" is a person who loses focus of the gospel — we are not accepted by God because of do's and

don't's. We are accepted in Christ. So why does Paul refer to such people as "weak?" One commentator puts it well:

"As the discussion shows, he does not mean a person who trusts Christ but little, the man of feeble faith (cf. 4:19). Rather, the person he has in mind is the one who does not understand the conduct implied by faith... he does not understand that when the meaning of justification by faith is grasped, questions like the use of meat and wine and special days becomes irrelevant."

– Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Paul is not saying that "weak" Christians aren't saved, nor even that they don't trust Christ. In fact, the "weak" are people who generally are the most fervent and diligent in trying to please Christ. Where they are "weak" is that there are remnants of a legalistic spirit still clinging to them. They have not worked out the implications of the gospel. If you are saved by grace alone, there is no need to feel you can somehow keep God's favor through rules and regulations.

A comparison with I Cor.8 really helps us here. With regard to a particular issue, one ethnic or social grouping could fall into being "weak" (like the Greeks in Corinth) while some other group could be strong. But with regards to another issue, the roles could be reversed (like the Jews here). This helps us see the broader principle beneath the cases. *The "weak" are any Christians who tend to promote and regard non-essential cultural and ceremonial customs as being critical for Christian maturity and effectiveness.* For example, the older generation in a particular church might feel very superior to the younger folk who like contemporary music in their worship. They do not deny that the younger people aren't Christians — but they could claim that it "displeases and offends the Lord" simply because it displeases and offends *them*. Thus they have taken an issue of taste or custom or culture and elevated it to an abiding, trans-cultural, mark of spiritual maturity.

3. vv.3, 15 What are the most natural and likely attitudes of the strong toward the weak? The weak toward the strong?

The attitude toward the weak by the strong: v.3 "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not..." Here Paul tells the strong not to feel superior to the weak. This means that the likely view of the strong is to feel much more mature and advanced and wise and "spiritually sophisticated." You look down upon the weak as being rather simple and narrow-minded. v.15 "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love." Here Paul says, the strong must not do something that "distresses" (lit. "grieves") the weaker brother. This means that the strong will feel completely justified in just proceeding with their practice, being convinced that it is not forbidden by God. Thus the likely attitude of the strong to the weak is to say: "that's *your* problem!" Thus they go on with their practice or attitude that the weak feel is displeasing and offensive to God.

The attitude toward the strong by the weak: v.3 "And the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does..." Notice that v.3 tells us the strong

will tend to feel superior and indifferent to the weak, but the weak will tend to *condemn* (lit. “judge”) the strong. That means they will not shrug at the strong (as the strong do to them), but will denounce and warn the strong that they are in grave spiritual danger, that they are displeasing and an affront to God.

Sum: The strong tend to take the weak too lightly — to not give them enough weight. The weak tend to take the strong too seriously — and will be deeply troubled and upset by their “licentiousness.”

4. What “charges” does Paul make to both strong and weak? Where are the strong doing wrong? Where are the weak?

Where the strong are wrong. It is interesting to notice that Paul gives the strong more criticism than the weak, even though he tells the strong that their position is more Biblical (v.14)! While he certainly critiques the weak, he gives more criticism to the strong. Here’s what he tells them:

1. **They are not being loving.** v.15 When you deliberately do something you know is grievous to a Christian brother or sister, you are not being loving. (We are not talking about activities we are *commanded* to do, like tithing, witnessing, etc. We are talking about things we are *allowed* to do. When we deliberately do what grieves another, we are being unloving.)
2. **Their unloving behavior destroys the work of God.** He tells the strong that they can “destroy” the weak brother (v.15). What does it to “destroy?” Some have thought that this means that the weak brother might be totally ruined and go to hell — but that is very unlikely. Most of Romans 8 was about how nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Are we to believe that the insensitivity of the strong to the weak is really going to send a Christian to hell? So we cannot conclude that the strong have the power to destroy someone’s Christianity. It gets clearer in v.20, where we are told that the strong’s insensitivity can “destroy the work of God.” Now this is the work that God is doing in every believer [Phil 1:6 — the good work he began in you], to bring him or her into the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph.4:13). In other words, the strong can retard or stymie the maturation of the weak into Christ-like wisdom and character. (Note: It is also possible the “the work of God” could mean the church, and thus the strong are harming the relationships within the church that God has built.)
3. **Their unloving behavior causes the brother to fall.** See v.13: “...not to put any stumbling block or an obstacle in your brother’s way,” and v.21, “cause your brother to fall.” Here we see how our insensitivity to the weak can harm the process of Christian maturation in them — it can lead them to “stumble” (Grk. word *proskomma* is used both in v.13 and v.20.) And this word must mean that the weak brother or sister is being tempted to sin. Now how can the strong’s insensitivity lead the weak to sin? a) At least, it tempts the weak to harshness, a condemning spirit, to breaking off fellowship, and an unkind, ungracious spirit. b) But possibly, the strong’s

action could lead the weak to begin to do things that are against their conscience. In v.23 Paul says, "The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is a sin." This means that the weak might begin to do things (encouraged by the strong) that they are not convinced are right (v.5). If they are not convinced they are right, then to do them would be a sin! Paul says a person must not do something unless they have studied and thought it out (e.g. through Bible study and conference with others) and become fully convinced (v.5) that it is right.

But let's say the weak person is convinced that all drinking of alcohol is a sin, but sees another believer doing it. He could easily decide, "well, I guess it is OK," because the "peer pressure" of the strong may lead him to drink. But if he does so without thinking it through and being very convinced that it is not contrary to God's will, then that will hurt his conscience — he feels guilty. Yet now that he is ignoring that guilt, he may become open to doing other things that are truly wrong.

Here's a real life example of this. I once knew a high school girl who had been raised in a strict church background that taught that it was a sin for women to wear makeup. But the peer pressure at school (from other Christian girls raised in other churches) led her to begin putting on makeup after leaving home in the morning (and wiping it off before coming home.) Now, though the Bible nowhere forbids makeup, the girl was violating her conscience as she did this. She was not "convinced." Spiritually, within herself, she was just choosing popularity over faithfulness to God. As a result, she soon found herself much more open to *real* violations of God's will in the area of sexuality. She had "stumbled" because of her Christian friends who mocked her scruples, even though they were wrong.

Where the weak are wrong:

1. **They are simply wrong about food and drink!** Paul very bluntly shows the weak that their position is not Biblical. v.14 "As one who is in the Lord Jesus I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself." Paul may be referring to Jesus own words here, for he argued with the Pharisees against the maintenance of the "clean" and "unclean" laws (Mark 7:14ff) and he gave a word to Peter about this, too (Acts 10:15,28). The reasons for this are at least two-fold: First, God did not create any material thing as evil. All things are good, it is only our own sinful hearts that use material things in such a way as to produce evil. (See I Timothy 4:1ff.) The other is probably that the clean-unclean laws were ways for God to teach the Israelites that they could not just come into his presence, but that there needed to be a purity. But in Christ, we are brought to God's presence holy and without blemish (Col.1:22). Therefore, to hold on to a squeamishness about the use of any material thing is a failure to realize the full implications of the doctrine of creation and/or the doctrine of redemption.
2. **They cannot distinguish between matters of basic principle and of individual preference.** v.1b says to not "pass judgment on *disputable* matters." The weak do not know when they are in the area of what Paul calls "disputable" and when they are in the area of "indisputable" issues. The Greek word used in v.1b is *dialogismoi*.

Traditionally, these have been called “matters of conscience.” A matter of conscience is a practice about which God has not specifically spoken in his word. He has not clearly forbidden it nor clearly commanded it. Today, one might say, a extreme “liberal” is one who thinks (wrongly) that nearly every area is a disputable matter of conscience, while the extreme “conservative” is one who thinks (wrongly) that hardly any area is a disputable matter of conscience.

5. What important theological/Biblical truths does Paul say the weak are forgetting? The strong?

What the strong are forgetting:

1. **That, because of Jesus’ death, the weak are “precious.”** Verse 15 is a strong statement — “Do not by your eating destroy your brother *for whom Christ died.*” Paul is reminding the strong that Jesus paid for every Christian with his life — an enormous price. If Jesus died for a brother or sister, then no matter how weak they are, we must treat them with utmost care and sensitivity. We must value them.
2. **That, because of their concern to serve God, they must be respected.** v.4 “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” To his own master he stands or falls. This challenge is to *both* the strong and the weak, but let us apply it to the strong for a moment. They might see the weak as narrow minded, but they should recognize that the so called narrowness comes from a burning desire to serve their Master and not live their life as they wish. The strong need to be careful that there is not a spirit of selfish individualism in them. Paul’s balanced handling of the “weak” shows that he is able to see the strengths and weaknesses of these people. He treats them gently and with respect because he sees their desire to serve and please their Lord (vv.7-8). For example, we know that some people in the early church centuries became Christians after living a very active and immoral sexual lifestyle. When they became Christians they turned away from all that and developed negative and prudish views of sex, and then they disapproved of Christians who didn’t share their attitudes. This is another example of being “weak in faith.” In zeal and gratitude for salvation, many people can develop strict attitudes toward food, clothing, sex, music, and other aspects of culture. Though Paul points out why such attitudes are not right, he also respects the zeal of these people, and refuses to allow other Christians to offend and trample on their sensibilities.

What the weak are forgetting:

1. **That God is the only judge.** While vv.13b-21 are mainly a criticism of the “strong,” vv.4-12 are mainly a criticism of the weak. Verse 4 is a strong warning against making a denunciation of a Christian who differs from you in a matter of conscience. The word “judge” here does not mean a simple evaluation, but a condemnation and denunciation. Paul says, “What you believe about these things [*dialogismoi* – v.1b] keep between yourself and God. Don’t dump on people with whom you disagree. For example, as Paul says here (vv.14a and 21) that drinking alcohol is not sinful in itself. There is no Bible text that forbids it to all. But a Christian may decide to abstain. In that case it is very wrong to judge and condemn others for drinking. Why?

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant (v.4)?” That means that the person is not *your* servant. Let the master, Jesus Christ, do the judging about whether the other person is serving him properly. We are not qualified to be judge. Paul continues in v.9 that Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord... then, why do you judge...? This is an important matter. When the Bible does not clearly prescribe behavior, we must leave a person’s conscience alone — for Jesus alone is Lord of our conscience: “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord...” (v.8)

2. **That we are all justified by faith.** Paul hints that the “weak” are forgetting that we are all justified by faith when he says “the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, *for God has accepted him*” (v.3b). This word “accepted” is the same word used in the initial exhortation for them to “accept” one another. In other words, Paul is saying, “you should welcome one another, because God has welcomed and accepted you.” This is powerful! Paul says we must remember that, whatever a Christian’s strength or weakness in behavior or views, he or she is completely loved and accepted by the Father through Christ. That is what the whole book of Romans is about. Now Paul applies the gospel to such disputes. “You need to be controlled by the knowledge that God accepts the other person and finds him or her ‘holy and without blemish’.”

“...the reason both the despising and the condemning of a fellow Christian are wrong is that God has accepted him (v.3). How dare we reject a person whom God has accepted? Indeed, the best way to determine what our attitude to other people should be is to determine what God’s attitude to them is. This principle is better even than the golden rule. It is safe to treat others as we would like them to treat us, but it is safer still to treat them as God does.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

6. What positive advice does he give both the strong and the weak, i.e., what course of action does he prescribe for each?

To the weak:

1. **Keep your views to yourself.** v.22 “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.” Here he tells the “weak” to recognize when some practice is in a “disputable” area, when it is among the *dialogismo*. When something is not clearly forbidden or commanded in Scripture, don’t press or loudly display your views and practices on the subject. Keep them to yourself. We must not press this to an extreme — Paul is not saying that you cannot give your opinion if it is asked for! Paul is not saying that you can never make evaluation. After all, Jesus told us to watch our for false prophets, etc. Rather, Paul means that, once we recognize that this is a “disputable” area, we should mind our own business.
2. **Get a more mature view of the kingdom of God.** In v.14 Paul tells the weak that they are plainly mistaken about created things, and in v.3 he hints that they have not worked out the full implications of the doctrine of justification. (See remarks on this

above.) In other words, Paul warns them against a legalism tendency. He brings this out in v.17, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." They must see that rules and regulations about material things miss the point of the kingdom. The point is transformed character — joy, peace, wisdom, love.

3. **Think through and get convinced about the rightness or wrongness of any practice.** Verse 5 is quite interesting and important: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." In other words, Paul says that we need to reflect upon and think out our behavior. First, we need to see whether the Bible really enjoins/forbids or leaves the conscience free in some area. Second, even if the Bible leaves us free, we may decide to abstain from some practice because it leads us as individuals to sin, or it leads others to sin. So determining all this takes thought! Paul is especially telling the weak to do this — because many people with a tendency to legalism are full of scruples because they haven't studied the Bible or thought things out.

"Alongside this explicit instruction not to violate the conscience, there is an implicit requirement to educate it."

– John Stott, *Romans*

But they cannot practice in that area unless they have thought it out and are firmly convinced in their mind that it is right. Notice, Paul even gives some idea of how to think out whether a practice is can be done or not. v.6 "He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord, and gives thanks to God." So the Christian must look at any practice and say, "Can I do this before Christ? Can I do it with an eye upon him? Can I do it in his name, thanking him for it?"

4. **Until you are convinced something is right, avoid it.** Why? Paul says several times, that if you are doubtful about something, it is important to avoid it. v.14b "If anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. v.23 "The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats." Refer to the story above under question #4 about the girl who wore makeup. If a person proceeds to do something when the conscience is against it, it damages that person spiritually. Indeed, it is a sin to do something if you *think* it is a sin. Why? Even if you are mistaken about what God's will *is*, it is a sin to put your will above his.

To the strong:

1. **Accept the weak brethren.** (v.1). The word "accept" (Greek, *proslambano*) means more than simply acquiescence. A better translation would be "to welcome," for the word means to receive someone into one's circle and into one's love. This is very important, because the tendency of the strong is to become more distant to the "weak" who disapprove of their behavior. Paul insists that there be an effort to keep up the relationship, and to not let the difference come between them. This is restated in v.19, when Paul says, "Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification." In short, Paul says that the strong must not avoid or write off the weaker brethren, but seek to stay close to them.

2. **Seek to respectfully convince him.** Here we have an example in Paul himself. In v.14 he tells us that *he* is one of the “strong” — he can eat anything! Well, what does he do with the weak? Notice that the whole of chapter 14 is, in a sense, a model of how the strong should approach the weak. He seeks to respectfully persuade the weak to re-examine their position. In v.14 and v.17 he reminds them about the nature of the kingdom of God. In other words, he is trying to help the weak become “convinced,” to think through, the broader more mature position. BUT, if the “weak” does come to a different position, Paul clearly shows a willingness to refrain from the offensive behavior. In v.5, Paul says that people need to carefully think through, Biblically and personally, their practice as Christians.
3. **Refrain from a practice if weaker brethren are possibly stumbling.** v.21 “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.” We must be careful here. “Stumble” and “fall” do not mean just to bother the weaker brothers. A grumpy Christian could blackmail a whole church in that case. Some churches have Christians who are very weak, and who have an enormous number of scruples. They are constantly getting irritated and upset because other church members are offending their sense of what is proper Christian behavior. The strong do not have to refrain from anything that “upsets” anyone else. But if the “weak” have a very deep and settled conviction — if they are “convinced” — and if they clearly are being tempted to bitterness or spiritual confusion, then the strong out of love should refrain. A good example of this is worship forms. If a “strong” person can enjoy and use a variety of music/worship forms, but a “weaker” person can only utilize one, then the strong should defer to the weak.

7. Choose one or two issues that divide Christians today. How would Paul’s principles here apply to it?

Throughout notes above I have used some modern examples and shown a few ways in which the principles can be applied. Now let the group work on a few cases.

Remember that the first, and most important principle is this: determine if the issue is in the “disputable area.” The way to do that is to look to the Scripture. If there is a *broad* disagreement among mature Christians on some issue (like baptism), then we must be willing to concede that it is “disputable.” Anyone who wants to put everything into the disputable area, needs to be warned about the dangers of that, and anyone who wants to put little or nothing in the disputable area must be warned of the dangers of that.

After a group of Christians agree to put an issue in the disputable area, then we need to follow Paul’s advice. The “weaker” must be willing to really review the Biblical data and rethink their position, and must refuse to condemn those who disagree. Instead they must allow others to follow their own conscience in the area. On the other hand, the “stronger” must also be willing to review the Biblical data and rethink their position, and then must be willing to curb his or her freedom to avoid discouraging or harming their brethren, especially if their convictions in the area are very strong.

Romans

Ministry and mission

Study 23 | Romans 15:1-16; 16

Summary

- 15:1-3 The Servant Heart: *Basis for Ministry*
- 15:4 The Scripture: *Guidance for Ministry*
- 15:5-13 The Unified Body: *Channel for Ministry*
- 15:14-23 The World: *Field for Ministry*
- 15:24-29 The Poor: *Special Concern for Ministry*
- 15:30-32 Prayer: *Power For Ministry*
- 16:1-16 Gifts and Groups: *Organizing for Ministry*

1. 15:1-3 What sweeping ethical principle is laid down here? How does it go beyond what was discussed in chapter 14?

The sweeping principle for Christian ethics is: The people with power must be stewards of their power to build up and please those who are weak. They are not to use their power to build up/enlarge themselves and make themselves comfortable.

The principle is sweeping because it applies everywhere:

1. **Finances:** It means that Christians with money are to look at their money as given to them by God to enrich and lift up those without it.
2. **Church leadership:** It means that Christians who are in leadership of a church are not to arrange the ministry to simply make themselves happy and comfortable, but with the outsider and the skeptic in mind.
3. **Relationships:** It means that we are not to simply relate to “our own kind” or with people who give to us and build us up emotionally. We must be willing to relate to and love people who are draining. A Christian does not walk into a room and immediately ask: “Are these people I want to be seen with? Are these people I will enjoy?”
4. **Choice of residence:** Instead of asking, “Where would I be most comfortable living?” you should ask, “Where could I be most useful living (to God and others)?” That is why many Christians stay in the city. “Community development” is ministry in which middle class Christians move into and give their lives to rebuild an economically devastated neighborhood. It is based on the principle of this text.
5. **Relationships in the church:** Paul applied this principle in Romans 14 to one particular case. In the church, we are not to seek to win arguments with Christians that differ, but respect them, re-examine our own positions, and if the differences persist, seek to accommodate ourselves to the sensitivities of others.

Clearly this statement follows on from the discussion of Romans 14, but when Paul uses the word neighbor in v.2, he is expanding on what he said. For though only Christians are my brothers and sisters, any human being is my *neighbor* (Luke 10:25ff.). Because Jesus came (v.3) not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45), we are to now have the same attitude toward everyone around us — a “servant heart.”

2. 15:3-4 What can we learn about the role of Scripture in our lives and the life of the church from these verses?

In v.3, Paul reminds us that our example is Jesus Christ, who “did not please himself.” In order to demonstrate this, he quotes from Psalm 69, which is quoted a number of times in the New Testament as a “Messianic” Psalm. In that Psalm, a good and righteous man endures undeserved suffering and persecution. Paul quotes Ps.69:9 where the speaker says, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” In other words, as an example of Christ’s refusal to please himself, Paul cites Jesus willingness to be mocked, tortured and killed on the cross by human beings who are enemies of God.

As soon as Paul quotes the Scripture, he briefly comments: “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (v.4). The implications of this are many: The scriptures are:

1. **Entirely applicable to today.** “the past was written to teach us.” In other words, anything preserved in the Scriptures is preserved to teach us something. And when Paul says, “everything,” he is teaching the “plenary” inspiration of the Bible. Every bit of it is designed by God for us, and every bit has lessons and applications.
2. **Centered on Christ.** Paul’s ability to quote Psalm 69 and apply it to Christ reminds us that basically, all of the Scripture is about Jesus. He told the disciples on the road to Emmaus that “*all* the Scriptures” were about him (Luke 24:27).
3. **If used properly, will increase “hope” in us.** The two ways it does that is through *endurance* (which means the Bible calls us to hard work and discipline!) but also through *encouragement* (which means the Bible makes incredible and precious promises). If we are willing to listen both to its commands and its promises, it increases hope — joyful persistence in life.

3. 15:5-7 What do these verses teach about the unity of Christians? How does it come?

- A. **Unity is a supernatural gift.** “God... give you a spirit of unity among yourselves” (v.5a). So first we must see that no method can create it. It is from him.
- B. **Unity comes from discipleship, a common following of Christ.** “As you follow Jesus Christ” (v.5b). This unity does not come when we seek it directly. Rather, it is a by-product of seeking something other than unity, namely, to follow Christ. Passive

Christians will not experience much unity. Only believers who are following hard — setting priorities for Christians growth and ministry — will experience deep unity.

- C. **Unity is associated with worshipping together.** So that “with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father...” (v.6). Probably the reference in v.6 to “mouth” is to corporate worship. There is no way to glorify God with “one mouth” unless you are singing and praying together! And the “so that” in v.6 means that God gives the spiritual unity so that we can worship together, so our seeking to do so will enhance unity.
- D. **Unity is based on our justification in Christ.** v.7 “Accept one another as Christ accepted you.” Legalism makes us very critical of others. Why? a) We need to constantly justify ourselves. There is an underlying anxiety of course, for we know deep down God wants perfection, and no one can give it! So people who are trying to earn their salvation try to quiet their own consciences by comparing themselves to others and finding fault with others in order to feel that God must favor them. They need desperately to convince themselves that they are the ones in the right. As a result, there is deep insecurity and critical spirit that leads to disputes. Also, b) we feel the need to tell others how to justify themselves! We will impose our legalism on others and insist that they tread the same road as we. Thus for a person without a grasp of the gospel, differences of opinion and practice are huge and insurmountable. But if we grasp justification, that we are *accepted in spite of our deficiencies and flaws*, then we will be enabled to accept others despite their deficiencies and flaws. In fact, the way you can tell *how much* you understand the gospel is to look at *how much* you can love people despite their flaws. Do you say, “if God overlooks my sins through Christ, how can I fail to do so with this person? Do I think I am more righteous than God?” [“Accepting” of course does not mean a refusal to confront someone about sin patterns — refer to Romans 12:9-21.]

4. 15:15-24 a) What do these verses teach about Paul’s ministry of ‘evangelism,’ of spreading the message of the gospel? b) What can we learn from them today?

a) What we learn about Paul’s ministry of evangelism.

1. The motive of Paul’s evangelism

Evangelism is not merely a duty, but a *passion* for Paul. He describes his work as “to the Gentiles... proclaiming the gospel of God” (v.16), and then he says that in that service “I glory” (v.17). Why? Paul evangelism is a priestly ministry: “The priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel... so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...” (v.16). As we saw (in our consideration of Romans 12:1) in the Old Testament, the job of a worshipper was to bring two basic kinds of sacrifices or offerings to God: a) sin offerings (for atonement for sin — asking forgiveness *from* Him); and b) burnt and thanksgiving offerings (for gratitude — giving service and honor to Him). The priest’s job was to offer these sacrifices on behalf of individuals or the people as a whole. In the New Testament, Christians understand that Jesus

has made the final and complete sin offering, but all people must still bring themselves and all they have as “offerings” of gratitude to God (see Heb.13:15,16 and Romans 12:1). Now here Paul sees Gentile converts as *his* offerings to God! He sees evangelism as a way of giving God praise and thanks. Just as in Rom.12:1 Paul said, “Give yourselves totally to God, in light of all Jesus has given to you,” so here Paul sees his evangelism as an offering to God in response to all Jesus has given him.

2. **The *object* of Paul’s evangelism.**

Paul’s purpose is “leading the Gentiles to *obey* God” (v.18). Paul mentioned in Rom.1:5 that he seeks out of the Gentiles the “obedience of *faith*.” In other words, the obedience Paul desires is that which arises as a response and consequence of the reception of the gospel, and the reception of God’s righteousness as a gift. But the point is — Paul’s goal in evangelism is not merely some kind of “conversion experience,” but completely changed lives. He wants people who are obedient and holy toward God. The goal of evangelism is complete life change. Persons have not been “evangelized” until they have ceased to be their own masters and have become bond-servants of the Lord.

3. **The *centrality* of Paul’s evangelism.**

Paul says, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God...” (v.18). This is a strong statement! Paul has accomplished many things — consider that he was probably the greatest theologian in the history of the Christian church. But his work as a theologian was not what made him glory. The only thing he was excited about were the people he had seen pass from death to life through his ministry. (Should we all feel like this? See below under b).

4. **The *means* of Paul’s evangelism.**

Paul says that he has won people to Christ, “By what I have *said* and *done*” (v.18). Literally, he says he has won people by “word and deed.” This means that he did not only get the message of the gospel across by speaking, but by his life and actions. He immediately mentions some of his deeds — “by the power of signs and miracles” (v.19). (Should we all expect miracles to be part of our evangelism? See below under b). We must be careful not to think that this was the only kind of “visual” or “deed” kind of evangelism Paul did. As we will see below under questions #5, Paul encouraged the church to care for the poor. And in I Thessalonians, Paul writes his converts:

“You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering...” (1:5-6). “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own lives as well... You are witnesses and so is God of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed...” (2:6-8,10).

This shows that Paul saw evangelism as “incarnational.” We are not only to tell people the gospel, but to *embody* the gospel in all our attitudes and relationships. We are to invite (in a sense “dare”) people to look into us all the way and see how a human life looks re-arranged by the gospel.

[It is unlikely that students will see this last point without help, but it is important to point out.]

5. **The strategy of Paul’s evangelism.**

Paul’s evangelistic strategy was *pioneering and urban*. He says, “From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” (v.19). This seems like a great overstatement, since the phrase literally means, “I have completed the preaching of Christ” in these regions. That Paul means this is made clear by v.23, where he says, “now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions.” How can Paul say this, when clearly there were hundreds of towns and villages and thousands upon thousands of people who he had not exposed to the Christian message. But here is the key to the statement — Paul’s missionary strategy was highly urban. He ignored the towns and villages; rather, he went into every large and influential city and evangelized until a vital growing movement of house churches was developing. Once he had done that, his work was done in a whole region — that is how central cities were to his thinking. If he had planted a church in the region’s biggest city, he was “done” in that area.

“This does not of course mean that Paul had [literally] ‘saturated’ the whole area with the gospel as we might say today. His strategy was to evangelize the populous and influential cities, and plant churches there, and then leave to others the radiation of the gospel into the surrounding villages.”

– John Stott, *Romans*

Also, Paul’s ministry was “pioneering.” He says, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (v.20). This means that, even in this early stage of the Christian church, many preachers preferred to take and build up people who had already been evangelized and disciplined by someone else. But Paul’s passion was to go into places where no one had heard the gospel at all. He wanted the “hardest ground” to plow in, the people who were the farthest from the faith. So Paul’s evangelistic strategy was to plant new churches in the largest cities among the most confirmed and pagan unbelievers.

b) What can we learn of Paul’s strategy for us today?

In general, Paul’s model is important for us all. The first two points mentioned above (the *motive* and *object*) can serve as ideals for all Christians. Many of us simply don’t have a passion for evangelism. Why? Paul shows us that our gratitude for our own salvation needs to be engaged to overcome our fears. And also, many Christians who *do* evangelism are superficial in their efforts to build up new converts and show them how to be obedient to the Lord in every area of life.

But we must also realize that Paul had some special gifts of evangelism that we do not all share. For example, Paul felt that nothing else he did in his life was as important or fulfilling as his evangelism. I think that probably reflects his specific calling to be a church-planting evangelist. Also, his calling to be an urban missionary who specializes in the most “hardened” unbelievers is probably also specific to his particular set of gifts and calling. However, his example should make the church as a whole recognize the tremendous importance of evangelism in general and of urban evangelism in particular.

What about the miracles? Miracles can happen today, but again, the number of miracles in Paul’s ministry was specific to his being an apostle. This is a large subject, but I will let a quote from John Stott guide us. He is commenting on Romans 15:18-19:

“This combination of words and works, the verbal and the visual, is a recognition that human beings often learn more through their eyes than through their ears. Words explain works, but works dramatize words. The public ministry of Jesus is the best example of this, and after his ascension into heaven he continued ‘to do and to teach’ through his apostles (Acts 1:1). It would be wrong to conclude, however, that ‘works’ means only miracles. One of Jesus’ most powerful visual aids was to take a child into his arms, and one of the early church’s was their common life and their care for the needy... Paul’s only other use of these three words [‘power’, ‘signs’, and ‘wonders’] is in relation to his ministry in II Cor. 12:12, where he calls them ‘the things that mark an apostle’. This is not to deny that God can perform miracles today... it is rather to acknowledge that their chief purpose was to authenticate the unique ministry of the apostles [Heb.2:4].

5. 15:25-29 What do these verses teach us about the church’s responsibility for the so-called “social” needs of people?

First, we see that **necessity** of it. Paul does not explain what has caused the poverty in the Jerusalem church. In Acts we are told that there was a famine (Acts 11:27), but there may have been other reasons. But Paul does not try to motivate the Roman Christians by explaining the circumstances of the poverty. Instead he says that the believers in Achaia and Macedonia had made a contribution to the poor (v.26) and they were pleased to do it, but then he adds, indeed they owe it to them (v.27). This means that helping the poor is not simply an option which we can get to if possible.

Second, we see the **motivation** of it. Paul shows that this “duty” is to be something that “pleases” us (v.26). It is to be something that wells up out of our hearts and gives us joy and fulfillment as we do it. In other words, our help of the needy, while a requirement, must not simply be a response to a requirement, but must be the overflow of a full heart. But what is it in the heart that makes us “pleased” to pour ourselves out for those in need?

Paul says that the Gentile Christians owe help to the poor Jewish Christians. Why? Because the gospel of grace came to the Gentiles through the Old Testament and the Jewish people. “If the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings, they owe it

to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (v.27). Thus, grace makes us "debtors" to those in need. We must be very careful not to confuse this with some kind of "racial reparations." Paul is *not* saying that all Gentiles owe all Jews on the basis of race. But Paul says, the Gentiles have received "spiritual blessings" through the gospel, and this should make us generous to those in need. Paul here shows that Gentiles should especially have an interest in helping Jewish believers in poverty. But the principle is not one of *race* but of *grace*. That is clear in 2 Cor. 8:8-9, where Paul appeals to the Corinthians to give to the Jerusalem poor, but he reminds them that *they owe the poor, because they owe Christ*. So Paul is using the fact of Gentile gratitude to the Jew as an addition to the basic issue, which is Christian gratitude toward Christ for grace.

Here then is a very different motivation for helping the poor! The socialist view is that the rich owe the poor because they have so much money. In the multiculturalist view, the white owe the ethnics because they have so much power. But in the Christian view, the saved with any money owe those without (especially other Christians without — Gal.6:10) because of the spiritual riches they have received in the gospel. Our salvation is a gift, not a wage, and so our reception of it leaves us as "debtors." God tells us to repay our debt to him by being generous to others. (Read 2 Cor. 8 and 9 thoroughly to see how he appealed to other churches to support the poor.)

Third, we see the importance or the priority of it. In vv.23-24 he explains his intention to go to Spain to preach and to go through Rome on his way, but now, however, "I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there" (v.25). In other words, this ministry to the poor was important enough for Paul to interrupt his preaching plans. It shows that Paul sees this as every bit as important in status as his evangelistic church planting mission.

6. 16:1-16 What do you learn about the life of the early church from this list of greetings and final notes?

1. About the ministry of women.

Who is Phoebe? First, she is "*commended*" to the church, and that probably means she was the one who brought Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Paul commends her as his sister and a servant, thus a woman of importance and usefulness in the church. What had she accomplished? She has been a great help for many people. This translates a single Greek word *prostatis* which means a 'benefactress.' So evidently she was a businesswoman or a woman of independent means who had been using her skills and wealth to support the church and help many people. She very likely was traveling to Rome on other business.

Second, Phoebe is called a "*servant*" but the NIV note says "*deaconess*." This is because in the Greek Phoebe is called a *diakonos*. That word can be translated in two different ways in the New Testament. Sometimes *diakonia* means "ministry" or "service" in the broadest sense. Any kind of service-provider in Jesus' name, from

the humblest service to the apostolic ministry of Peter and Paul can be called *diakonos*. The NIV translators opt for this general sense. We don't know what ministry Phoebe had, but she had one, and so she is called *servant*. But sometimes in the New Testament, the word denoted specific office in the church — a *deacon* (Phil.1:1; I Tim.3:8,11). These officers worked beside the elders, and they usually focused on meeting material and physical needs, and providing comfort and support for the distressed and broken (see Acts 6:1-7). There is no sure way to be certain which sense of the word should be used here. But it does not matter, for it shows Phoebe prominent and recognized for her work in the early church.

2. **About the diversity of the church.**

We cannot know about all the 26 individuals Paul names here, but it is clear that the Roman church was a diverse body. Notice: **1) Race.** We have both Jewish (e.g. Aquila and Priscilla, and Paul's relatives in v.7 and v.11) and Gentile Christians. **2) Class.** This will not be evident to most students, but some of the names in the list were probably of royal and high rank: Aristobulus (v.10) and Narcissus (v.11). Notice that both of these are said to have been the head of a "household" or estate. **3) Gender.** Eight or nine out of the 26 persons named are women. Paul singles out many of them as having worked hard (v.12). This (along with the comments on Phoebe) shows that women were active and influential in the ongoing ministry and mission of the church.

3. **About the structure of the church.**

It was essentially a series of house churches or small groups. Paul greets the church that meets in their [Priscilla and Aquila] house (v.5). Also, in v.14 and v.15, some people are greeted and all the saints with them, probably referring to the rest of the people that met in their house church. This was the normal form of the church in the earliest times (cf. I Cor.16:19; Col.4:15; Philemon 2). It means that Christians met in family-size groups to carry out the ministries that we have seen elsewhere in chapters 15-16: Bible study, worship, fellowship, evangelism, deed ministry.

7. **15:1-16:16 Review and list now all the various "ministries" that a community of Christians should be engaged in. Evaluate your own congregation and yourself in light of what you've learned.**

There are several ways to list them. Here is one:

- a. 15:1-3 **General ministry:** The mind-set: Don't please yourself!
- b. 15:4 **Educational ministry:** Grounding people in the Word of God.
- c. 15:5-7 **Fellowship ministry:** Developing deep unity. Accepting one another. Worship together
- d. 15:14-23 **Evangelism ministry:** Leading people to faith and discipling them in obedience to the Lord
- e. 15:25-29 **Deed ministry:** Helping the poor
- f. 16:1-16 **Small group ministry:** Using everyone's gifts

Romans

Introducing the Gospel

Study 1 | Romans 1:1-17

1. (v.1, 6) What is the passion and ultimate goal of Paul's life?
2. (v.1-6) What do we learn about the content of this gospel from the first 6 verses?
3. (v.8-15) What is the immediate goal of Paul?
4. (v.16) Why does Paul refer to being not ashamed (i.e. offended) by the gospel? In what ways can the gospel offend or be despised?
5. (v.16) What does Paul mean when he calls the gospel "the power of God"? In what ways is it powerful?

6. (v.16) What releases the power of the gospel into our lives?

7. (v.17) What is the righteousness spoken of here?

8. (v.17) What does it mean to “live” by this righteousness of faith?

Romans

The pagans need the Gospel

Study 2 | Romans 1:18-32

1. (v.18) What does this verse tells us about the wrath of God?
2. (v.18-21) Why does Paul say that all human beings are “without excuse” if they don’t seek or serve God?
3. (v.20) What is made plain to us about God (and what is not)?
4. (v.22-25) What does tell us always happens to human beings who reject worship of the true God?
5. Application: What are some examples of idols? How are all problems the result of “worshipping the creature rather than the creator”?

Romans

The religious need the Gospel I

Study 3 | Romans 2:1-16

1. (v.1) – “you therefore, have no excuse” Why does Paul address the religious in chap 2 right after his denunciations of 1:18-32? How do religious people “miss the gospel”?
2. (v.1-3) What are the consequences of condemning and judging others?
3. (v.4-5) What do these verses teach us about the patience of God?
4. (v.6-10) What is the general test by which God will judge people at the end? Does this contradict what Paul said about salvation in 1:16-17?

Romans

The religious need the Gospel II

Study 4 | Romans 2:17-3:8

- 1. (v.17-24) List 5-6 things Paul says the Jews of his day were proud of. How do they all boil down to one basic factor? In v. 25-29 Paul names a second basic factor on which the Jews relied — what was it?**
- 2. Insert “Christian” for “Jew”, and other words for “circumcision” and paraphrase vv. 17-20 and vv.25-29 as a warning to active church people today.**
- 3. (v.22) Since Jews totally abhorred idols and would never take one for themselves, what does Paul mean when he charges them with “robbing temples”?**
- 4. (v.21-24) How and why does the first of these false confidences fail? v.25-29 How does the second fail?**

Romans

Everyone needs the Gospel

Study 5 | Romans 3:9-20

1. (v.9) Paul says every person is “under sin”. a) What does that mean? b) How can both religious people (Jews) and depraved pagans be “alike” under sin?
2. (v.10-18) Paul gives us a long list of all the effects of sin on us. There are at least seven. What are they?
3. (v.11) Paul says “no one seeks for God”. a) What does this mean? b) How does this statement square with all the people who seem to be searching for God?
4. (v.11) If Paul is right, what does it mean about *anyone* who is truly seeking to come into God’s presence?

Romans

How justification works

Study 6 | Romans 3:21-31

1. (v.21-24) What can we learn from these 4 verses about what this “righteousness from God” is?
2. (v.22-25) What can we learn from these 4 verses about how this “righteousness from God” is received (and by whom)?
3. (v.24-26) Why does God only justify “through” his blood or “atoning sacrifice”? Can’t God just forgive us?
4. (v.25) The word “atoning sacrifice” in NIV translation can also be rendered “propitiation”. Look up “propitiation” in a dictionary — what does this word tell us about what Jesus death did for us?
5. (v.25-26) How can Jesus’ “atoning sacrifice” make God both “just” AND “the one who justifies” of those who believe?

6. What distortions enter our lives if we think of God only as “just” or only as “justifier”?

7. Paul says the gospel excludes boasting (v.27). How does it do that? How has it excluded boasting in you?

Romans

When justification started

Study 7 | Romans 4:1-25

- 1. Look at each place the word “credited” is used. Put the meaning of the term in your own words.**
- 2. The Jews of the time thought faith = obedience of the law. How does Paul in vv.2-4 show that saving faith is no that?**
- 3. Name the two parts of real saving faith according to v.5. Guiding Question: Paul says a Christian is one who “does not work.” (v.5) What does that mean?**
- 4. How does this definition of faith differ from what so many churchgoers and religious people think faith is?**

Romans

What justification brings

Study 8 | Romans 5:1-11

Note: Please don't read or do the attached exercise until reading the passage and answering the questions.

- 1. (v.1-2) List all the benefits which justification brings for us to enjoy?**
- 2. (v.9-10) How secure is the future for a Christian, and why?**
- 3. (v.3-4) How does Paul answer the question: "What good is all this if we suffer?" Why does he say we should rejoice in our suffering, not for them? How can we rejoice in suffering?**
- 4. (v. 5-8) By what two ways can we know that God loves us?**
- 5. (v.12) What are the signs that you are rejoicing in your reconciliation?**

EXERCISE

Read the following questions and answers.

Trials and the Gospel

1. (v.3-5) How does Paul tell us suffering can change us?

Remember that Paul is telling us how suffering affects a person *who knows he or she is justified strictly by grace, not works*. In that case, Paul says suffering begins a chain reaction:

1. Suffering leads to “perseverance” (v.3). This is a word that really means single-mindedness. Suffering makes us “focus” — it helps us focus on what is really important. It makes us remember what really is lasting, helps us to re-align priorities, and so on. It removes distractions.
2. “Perseverance” leads to “character”. This is a word that really means “testedness”. It is a quality of confidence that comes from having been through an experience. It only comes from following through, and doing your duty despite it all. But the result is a growing poise only comes from the experience. For example, a sports team new to the championship playoffs may play poorly because they have not been in the position before. But a “tested” team will have no jitters. They perform well because they have been there before. Notice that without the first step, the second step won’t happen. **Suffering, if it first leads you to focus on God and proper priorities, will lead to greater confidence as you come through it.**
3. All this leads to growth in “hope”, which is a stronger assurance of one’s peace, access and future glory. Paul’s addition of v.5 right after v.3-4 seems to mean that Christians who a) focus single-mindedly on prayer and obedience to God, and who b) grow in confidence, will c) experience more of his love during suffering. “Poured out his love into our hearts.” Many Christians testify that they feel more of God’s presence and love during suffering, because it makes them focus and trust in him more.

Here’s the amazing assertion of Paul. When he shows that suffering starts a chain reaction that leads to *hope*, which is one of the fruits of justification, he is saying that the benefits of justification are self-propagating. They are not only *not* diminished by suffering, but they are enlarged by suffering. In other words, **if you face suffering with a clear grasp of justification by grace alone, your joy in that grace will deepen**, but (as he implies) **if you face suffering with a mindset of justification by works, the suffering will break you, not make you.**

Consider how persons takes suffering who are trying to be justified by works. Self-justifiers are always insecure at a deep level because they know they aren’t living up to their standards, but cannot admit it. So when suffering hits, they immediately feel they are being punished for their sins. They cannot take confidence in God’s love (v.5). Since

their belief God loved them was inadequately based anyway, now suffering shatters them. Suffering drives them away from God rather than toward him.

2. Now consider some specific difficulty or trial you have experienced as a Christian. Did you see it doing in you what Paul describes? Why or why not?

Here are some things to consider as you are analyzing your own “case study”.

- A. Did it lead you to focus — to *single-mindedness*? Did it help you sift out the unimportant from the important? Did it help you focus attention more on prayer and on what God has done for you?
- B. Has your sufferings produced *testedness*? Did you follow through despite fears? In other words, did it bring a kind of maturity and confidence that comes from having been through it all? Are you a less jittery person, a less fearful person?
- C. Did it lead you to actual deeper experience of his presence and his love? Did you find a greater closeness, a sense of nearness?

If your sufferings did not lead to this, analyze why:

- 1. **Was it failures of the will?** Did you simply fail to spend time with God in worship and reflection? Or did you disobey him in some way to escape the hardness of the situation?
- 2. **Was it a failure of understanding the gospel?** Did the suffering make you doubt God’s love? That is a natural response, but did you eventually shake that off? The speed with which you do that is an indication of the degree of your understanding of justification. Remember that God can use suffering to “awaken” a person to some sin — as a kind of “intervention”. But interventions are only done by people out of love. God can and will treat you roughly if you need it, like a loving parent will do with wayward child — but all out of deep concern. If you are a Christian, God has sent all your punishment on to Christ. All his wrath for you fell into the heart of Jesus and was swallowed up and absorbed there — it disappeared

Romans

Why justification comes

Study 9 | Romans 5:12-21

1. (v.12) Why the “therefore” in v.12? What is the link to the previous passage

2. (v.12) What do you learn about the relationship of sin and death in this one verse?

3. Read the following note.

The verb in v.12 “because all sinned” is an “aorist” tense. A Greek aorist tense is a past perfect even more definite and strong than our English perfect tense. The aorist always points to a *single past action*. It says that the whole race sinned in one single past action. To use a large collective noun “all” with such a specific verb tense is so awkward that it must be deliberate. If Paul meant “all sinned continually and individually” he would have used the present or the imperfect tense. One author put it this way: “if we are to give the aorist tense its full value [here], and in this argument we must do so, the more precise meaning will be that sin and death entered into the world because all men were guilty of *one act of sin*.” (William Barclay, *Expository Times*, LXX (1958-59), p. 192.

How does v.13-14 demonstrate that all die not because they sinned *like* Adam, but *in* Adam?

Romans

Union with Christ

Study 10 | Romans 6:1-14

- 1. Why does Paul pose the question in v.1? And what new subject will it help Paul introduce in the next chapters?**
- 2. (v.2) What does it mean that we “died to sin”?**
- 3. What are the signs that a person is no longer under the “mastery” (v.14) and the “reign” (v.12) from sin?**
- 4. (v.3-5) How does Paul show that salvation through union with Christ necessarily leads to a changed life moving away from sin?**

Romans

Servants of God

Study 11 | Romans 6:15-7:6

1. (v.15) Put Paul's question in your own words. Is his question of v.15 identical to his question of 6:1? What issue is he now addressing?
2. (v.16-18) What (in these verses) is the main argument brought against the notion that Christians are free to sin?
3. (v.16-23) How do the two possible "slaveries" compare a) in their origin, b) their development, c) their results?
4. (v.18-19) How practically do we live out and maintain our freedom from sin?

5. (7:1-6) a) What does the marriage metaphor teach us about our relationship to the law? b) our relationship to Christ? (Hint: How does the metaphor continue to answer the question of 6:15 – “are Christians now free to live as they choose?”)

6. (7:6) In light of the marriage metaphor, what do you think it means to serve “in the new way of the Spirit” rather than in “the only way of the written code?”

7. Verse 7:4 says we have to be “dead to the law” to “bear fruit for God.” How does being “not under the law” help us break develop a holy life?

Romans

Warfare with sin

Study 12 | Romans 7:7-25

1. (v.7, 8, 13) It is the purpose of the law to show us something. a) What is it and b) in what ways does it do this?
2. (v.8-9) How, do you think, does the law actually aggravate or stir up the sin in our hearts (cf. v.5)? [Consult your own experience.]
3. (v.8-9) What do you think Paul meant when he said, "I was alive apart from the law"? And what do you think he meant when he says "Sin came and I died?"
4. (v.7-8) Which Biblical commandment seems to have "slain" Paul? Why, do you think would a Pharisee like Paul be so convicted by it?

During the rest of this week, please keep the following “tongue assignment”. (These prescriptions come from various places in the New Testament.)

- 1. Do not complain or grumble.**
- 2. Do not boast about anything.**
- 3. Do not gossip or repeat a matter.**
- 4. Do not run someone down — even a little bit.**
- 5. Do not defend or excuse yourself, no matter what.**
- 6. Do continually affirm others.**

The purpose of this assignment is to reveal your own heart to you. Most people will have trouble lasting more than 3 or 4 hours without breaking it. (Of course, if you do last longer, you can’t brag to anyone of it!) This is a practical way to see the purpose of the law as Paul describes it.

Romans

Fighting sin with the Spirit

Study 13 | Romans 8:1-13

1. (v.1) What does the phrase 'no condemnation' mean? Paraphrase it several ways. Does 'no condemnation' refer only to our past, or also to our present and future?
2. (v.1) One wrote: "most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of this verse [that there is 'no condemnation']." What troubles does this cause?
3. (v.1-2) What two great benefits have been given to us who are in Christ Jesus? (v.3-4) How did we get each of the two benefits come to us? What is the final purpose of both of them (v.4)?
4. (v.5-6) What does Paul say here is the connection between "minding" and "living"? What do you think it means to 'set the mind' on the Spirit in light of the rest of Romans 8?

Romans

Living as children of God

Study 14 | Romans 8:14-27

1. (v.14-15) Is everyone a child of God? Why or why not? What does it mean to be 'led by the Spirit'?
2. What are our privileges of being an adopted son of God? (Collect from whole passage)
3. (v.15) What is the difference between the two "spirits"? Make a list of how a slave's relationship to a head of an estate would specifically differ from that of a son. Which list describes your relationship to God best?
4. (v.16) How might the Spirit "testify" with your Spirit that you belong to him?

Romans

Facing life with confidence

Study 15 | Romans 8:28-39

- 1. (v.28) In what ways does a belief in the promise of v.28 effect the way we face a) the good and, b) bad circumstances, and even c) the failures and sins of our lives?**
- 2. (v.28) What does Paul say are the two conditions for receiving this promise? What does each term mean?**
- 3. (v.28) What does this text imply is the effect of "all things" on those who don't love God? Why do you think the effect is different on them?**
- 4. (v.29-30) How does v.29-30 explain what God's ultimate "purpose" in history is, and also what our ultimate "good" is in v.28?**

5. (v.29-30) How many groups or sets of people is he talking about in v.29-30? List the five active verbs in v.29-30 that describe what God does to this group. What does each term mean (remembering that this is the same group of people)?

6. (v.28-31) Why can Paul use the past tense “glorified” when speaking of Christian? What does this tell us about the certainty of our final salvation?

7. (v. 31-39) Paraphrase each of the five questions Paul poses (v. 31-35). Summarize Paul’s answer (v. 36-39) to the questions. How does the answer depend on the doctrine of v. 28-30? What is the practical purpose of the questions?

Romans

God's sovereignty

Study 16 | Romans 9:1-29

- 1. (v.1-5) Why would Paul think about the unbelief of the majority of Israel after chapter 8?**
- 2. (v.4-5) What are each of the benefits enjoyed by Israel (v.4-5) and how does each prepare us and point toward Christ?**
- 3. (v.6-13) How does Paul account for Jewish unbelief and still defend the 'word' (promises) of God (v.6)? How does he illustrate and prove his answer from the Old Testament?**
- 4. (v.10-13) Why does Paul say it was Jacob that became a child who inherited the promises to Abraham, but Esau did not?**

Romans

Our responsibility

Study 17 | Romans 9:30-10:21

- 1. (9:30-33) What does Paul say here is the reason for Jewish unbelief? Does this contradict what Paul says in 9:14-18? If not, why not and how not?**
- 2. (9:30-33) What is completely 'topsy-turvy' about the situation Paul describes in how Jew and Gentile responded to the gospel? Why do you think that people are more concerned about religion and righteousness might be more prone to miss the gospel?**
- 3. (10:1-8) What does Paul give Israel credit for (v.2a)? What does he say is the reason they did not submit to the gospel (v.2b-3)? Why blame them, then? How does Paul show that they should have known the gospel?**
- 4. (10:4) In what specific way is Christ the end of the law? Therefore, in what way(s) is Christ not the end of the law? (Draw on what you have learned previously in Romans).**

5. (10:9-13) What do these verses tell us about how to become a Christian?

6. (10:14-17) What do these verses tell us about evangelism? How are faith and hearing the word related in your own life?

7. (10:18-21) Summarize the steps in Paul's final case for why Israel is inexcusable?

Romans

God and Israel

Study 18 | Romans 11:1-36

1. (v.1-6) What are the three or four bits of evidence that Paul gives to prove that God has not rejected the Jews?
2. (v.7-10) How does the word 'retribution' in v.9 answer the person who says "It is unfair of God to harden a person's heart and mind toward the gospel! They never had a chance!" (Refer to similar verses in chapter 9 or 10).
3. (v.7) How is it possible to so want to please God that you reject his love for you? Have you seen this happen?
4. (v.11-16) What does Paul mean when he says he seeks to make unbelievers, especially Jewish unbelievers "envy"? Isn't that stirring up unworthy motives?

5. (v.17-24) How does the olive tree metaphor warn the Gentiles? How does it square with what Paul said in 8:28-38 about the certainty of our salvation?

6. (v. 25-32) What is the 'mystery' Paul now reveals?

7. (v.33-36) This is Paul breaking into spontaneous worship! What can we learn about our own worship from this example?

Romans

New relationships: God and the Church

Study 19 | Romans 11:1-36

1. (v.1-2) What two things does Paul urge us to do? What do they mean practically?
2. (v.1) a) What does Paul show is the only sufficient motivation for the hard work of Christian living? b) What other motivations are possible and how are they ineffective?
3. (v.1-2) How does Paul explain what is the right way to overcome spiritual stagnation and disobedience? i.e. How can we bring our hearts to “offer” ourselves wholly?
4. (v.3-4) What two mistakes should Christians avoid when thinking of themselves?

5. (v.3-4) From what two sources does a Christian get his or her self-image?

6. (v.3-8) Discern the “steps” or ways that Paul says one should take in order to discern one’s spiritual gifts.

7. (v.6-8) Give each gift a brief definition, on the basis of what you know from the rest of the Bible. Which ones could possibly describe you?

Romans

New relationships: Friends and enemies

Study 20 | Romans 12:9-21

1. (v.9) What do the three imperatives in this verse have in common? Why are these commands so important for setting up a lifestyle of love?

2. (v.9) How can we love unlovely persons who we do not like and yet still be "sincere"?

3. (v.10-16) Divide the 12-13 exhortations in these verses into 2-3 basic categories. Give a simple Biblical definition of love.

4. (v.10-16) How does the gospel alone make each aspect of love possible?

5. (v.10-16) Many think “sacrificial love” is unhealthy. How do the varied exhortations about love balance each other and prevent extremes?

6. (v.17-21) a) What things are we to do to those who are hostile to us? b) Why are we to do them? (i.e. what are our motives and reasons)?

7. Look at the following list and do a personal inventory. Ask: a) in which 2 of these am I weakest? b) where will I need them next (where will I be tested)? c) what practical steps can I take to strengthen myself in these two areas?

Love the unattractive people but with repentance and sincerity. (v.9)

Love but don't make the person an idol who leads you to allow him/her to sin or you to sin. (v.9)

Love with dogged affection over the long haul, no matter what. Stay loyal. (v.10-12)

Love by making people feel honored and valuable. Listen and show utmost consideration to those around you. (v.10)

Love by being generous in a practical way with your home, money, and time. (v.13)

Love without bitterness. Don't pay back or hold resentment against others. (v.14)

Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. (v.15)

Love with humility, Be willing to associate with people who are very different than you. (v.16)

Love by not avoiding hostile people, but planning appropriate kind and courteous words and deeds. (v.21)

Romans

New relationships: The world

Study 21 | Romans 13:1-14

- 1. (v.1-7) What reasons does Paul give in verses 1-7 why it is right to submit to the authority of the civil government?**
- 2. (v.1-7) How absolute is the state's power over us? What indication is there in the text that the authority of the state has limits? What indication do you know of elsewhere in the Bible regarding limits to this authority?**
- 3. (v.1-7) a) What is the "job description" of the state — its purposes and functions? b) What is the "job description" of the Christian citizen?**
- 4. In what practical ways do Christians in this country today especially need to heed and apply these principles for understanding and relating to our government?**

5. (v. 8-10) Why does vv.8-10 follow v.5-7? How are they related?

6. (v.8-10) a) How does Paul define love? b) How does this answer the person who says, "obedience to the rules of the law is not important — only love is"?

7. (v.11-14) What practical advice does Paul give us here for self-control?

Romans

New relationships: To the weak

Study 22 | Romans 14:1-23

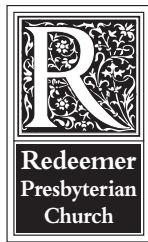
1. (v.2-3, 5, 14, 20-21) What are the differences of opinion between the 'strong' and the 'weak'?
2. (v.3) What do you think is a "weak in faith" Christian? Why does Paul refer to someone like this as "weak"?
3. (v.3, 15) What are the most natural and likely attitudes of the strong toward the weak? the weak toward the strong?
4. What "charges" does Paul make to both strong and weak? Where are the strong doing wrong? Where are the weak?

Romans

Ministry and mission

Study 23 | Romans 15:1-16:16

- 1. (15:1-3) What sweeping ethical principle is laid down here? How does it go beyond what was discussed in chapter 14?**
- 2. (15:3-4) What can we learn about the role of Scripture in our lives and the life of the church from these verses?**
- 3. (15:5-7) What do these verses teach about the unity of Christians? How does it come?**
- 4. (15:15-24) a) What do these verses teach about Paul's ministry of 'evangelism', of spreading the message of the gospel? b) What can we learn from them today?**



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