

A Study of Romans

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Volume II, Romans 8-16

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CONTENTS

Romans 8, 4

Romans 9, 103

Romans 10, 149

Romans 11, 179

Romans 12, 233

Romans 13, 276

Romans 14, 301

Romans 15, 334

Romans 16, 370

VOLUME II

We continue...

8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”

But why? Part of the answer we have already seen. “Therefore” demands a series of proofs. Got to have the proofs before the conclusion. What are the proofs that there is no condemnation?

We have to sneak ahead to the rest of the verse to get the full sense of the “therefore.” What is the full conclusion? Just that there is no condemnation for anyone? No. It’s a specially select group of people that you will find in every corner of the world, thanks to the preachers and missionaries that have taken this Gospel out. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

But even that is not enough. He describes those who are in Christ Jesus as those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. All of verse 1 is his conclusion. And it is based at least in part on the things he has just said in chapter 7. I say “in part” because there are statements elsewhere in the book that would lead us to this conclusion, but chapter 7 will suffice. Here are at least three proofs just in that difficult chapter we just covered.

Since we have become dead to the law through the Jesus who raised from the grave, 7:4, and

Since we have been delivered from the law to walk in the newness of the Spirit, 7:6, and

Since Jesus Christ has delivered and will deliver me from this body of death that ensnares me now, 7:24-25,

Therefore, there is no condemnation.

The word demands an investigation. We think of condemnation as a feeling. "I just feel so condemned when he preaches." "Oh the Devil's been putting condemnation on me today." It's not a feeling or an attitude you can pick up from someone else. Condemnation is the verdict of the judge. Sir, you are guilty as charged.

It would be impossible to read the book of Romans without hearing that verdict. The judge has spoken. The sentence has been made: Guilty of death. Romans 3:23, All have sinned. Romans 6:23, The wages of sin is death. To show you that feelings have nothing to do with it, line up ten people outside and ask them if they feel condemned by God. Most of them will deny it. I don't feel condemned, they will say. But they are.

Line up ten believers and ask them if condemnation is ever in their thoughts, and many will tell you that indeed that is the case. Feelings have nothing to do with it. Your feeling of being condemned one day and saved the next does not mean that the Judge is sitting at the Bench every day and ruling guilty one day and not guilty the next.

A woman was taken in adultery. The verdict of the law was, she should be stoned. That wasn't just a feeling, it was the very word of God. She sinned. Guilty as charged. The Pharisees were right. She should have been stoned that very hour and sent into eternity lost. That was the verdict.

Remember what Jesus said to her after the Pharisees marched out single file with their heads on their chests convicted of their own sins and God's guilty verdict on them? He said, has no one "condemned you"? Humanly speaking, no one had. So Jesus issued a verdict: "Neither do I condemn you." Innocent, though charged. Forgiven. Walk free. No condemnation. Jesus acted out, lived out, exactly what Paul has put here in a doctrinal statement.

No condemnation. Verdict reversed. Some who hear this are still asking what the Pharisees asked at that time. How can Jesus reverse the law of God? How can the Son come against the Father? How can Jesus oppose Moses? Is the law sin?

That question was dealt with in the last chapters of Romans. The answers: No, Jesus the Son cannot reverse the laws of God. What God has spoken is true forever. Guilt must be dealt with. But one thing that God, because of Jesus, can do, in fact the only thing, is cover the sin. Forgive it. Blot it out. The Son is not against the Father. The Father wants to forgive, and showed us that in Christ, not by making the law go away, but by paying the penalty that the law required.

But wait! What about the word “now” in there? The “is” already makes it a present tense idea. Why add “now”? Is he saying that “now” there is no condemnation, but maybe later we might experience it? Is “now” an element of doubt about our security?

No. For centuries men lived under the condemnation of the law. You sin, you die. Period. But now, because of what Christ has done, that’s erased. And God’s eraser is powerful. He won’t keep changing His mind. For eighteen years Dad has said to Junior, you will not drive this car. You’re too young. No license. No skill. No money. But now, here’s the keys. Junior might refuse those keys, but Dad’s will is set and unchangeable. Things have changed.

For the human race, things have changed. No condemnation! Such good news! But let’s return to the rest of the verse...

“... to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

Not just *with* Him. Judas walked along with Jesus for three years, but when the Spirit fell on the apostles, he was gone. His heart had never been given to Jesus and Jesus did not give His heart to him.

Not just *around* Him. Not just showing up in church every week, hangin' around the people of God, hoping some of it will rub off.

Not just *under* Him. That is, you try to submit yourself to the rules of the church and the Bible. You do your best. You respect the ways of God. You are under His authority. In the Jewish sense you would have been a good person. Like Saul from Tarsus.

Not just *for* Him. If Jesus were running for office, you'd vote for Him. You like His humility and compassion. You are amazed that He would give His young life for His friends. Jesus is a great example to you, and you are all for Him.

How many of the earth's two billion plus "Christians" fall into these categories? They are on His side, wear His Name, promote His causes. But the promise is not to them unless another preposition enters into the conversation.

In. In Christ. Have you thought about it lately? Many on that day will say they did things in His Name. But they will be told they were not known. They were not inside. Not in the church only. But in Him. A part of Him. Baptized by the Holy Spirit into Him. Made to drink of Him.

These are the ones Jesus prayed for in John 17. Look at verses 20 and 21: "I do not ask for these only [the ones standing in front of Me right now] but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us..."

Unity is not the goal. The world's "church" is coming into greater and greater unity, as this truth and that truth are dropped off from the statements of faith. Rome is appealing to not only Christian groups but all religions to drop their distinctives and come to Mama. One big united church. But when they have accomplished that goal, there will still be

another group outside that world church that will be united because they are in Him. The world's church will be outside Him.

To be in Him means to have constant fellowship with Him. It means to have His Word flowing through our spirit. It means that the Infinite God has actually entered the person of the finite spirit of man. It means that that man has by the Spirit meshed with God in some way. A mystery that is real but unfathomable.

And if this God is in you and you are in this God, in Jesus Christ through His Spirit, you will never be condemned.

“... who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

This part of the verse is in the KJV and NKJV, but the scholars tell us that it is not found in the earlier manuscripts. Please understand that the different translators do not suddenly decide, as they are looking at the English of a former version, We think we don't like that passage, we'll just leave it out in our new translation.

The whole issue of differences is the different Greek texts that are available. The battle has raged over the years as to which texts are the most reliable. There are good arguments on both sides of the issue. Bottom line: nothing serious has been changed in any reputable translation. There are translations that tell you up front they are paraphrases. There are translations made by cultic groups, like the Jehovah's Witnesses. All of these we put aside. But any translation made by evangelical scholarship needs a fair hearing.

The good news about the missing part of Romans 8:1 is that you will find the very same words in Romans 8:4. So we'll talk about those words when we come there.

8:2

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

The latter part of chapter 7 tells of Paul’s ongoing struggle with sin. The wretchedness of this fleshly body in which we live. The very real presence of sin inside of us, lurking there to try to bring us back into bondage. The way that sin uses the very law of God to trap us. And there he talks about two laws. Law one, the law of God in the inner man. Law two: Evil is present with me. Sin is in my members. My body is a body of death.

Now we have another law introduced, at least we have another name given to one of those laws of chapter 7. Perhaps we can say it is re-introduced. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

At the end of chapter 7, Paul thanks God that Jesus is the deliverer from the body of death. The same thing is being said here. Yes, there is a “law”, the sin-principle, inside of me. But equally “yes” there is a Spirit-principle that cancels out that sin principle. Both laws cannot operate at the same time, though both can be present. When Christ is reigning in your heart, sin does not have a chance, though it is alive. We become dead to sin.

When temptation comes, our mind is drawn back to the evil things we have done before, or enticed by the evil world that is still around us. The remedy: the Spirit of God in us will bring in counter-thoughts, counter suggestions, and drive those evil thoughts out. When we pray, read God’s Word, hear music or a sermon, fellowship with believers, sin is defeated. These are the means God has chosen. It is not some constant miracle deliverance that the Spirit puts in place. It is a combination of means.

Yes, the body of death is in us. But no, we do not have to obey it. We are free because of what the Spirit has done and is doing. Always remember though, that “free from it” does not mean that “it” does not exist, or somehow died, or left the body.

We in America are a free people. Free from the Russians. But the Russians exist. Free from the Vatican. But the Vatican exists. Free from Islam's domination. But Islam exists. Free from a hundred enemies, but many of them still threaten us as a nation.

In Christ we are free from sin. But sin will continue to challenge. Before, sin had bound us altogether. No options. We lived in sin. Now we have the option of Christ control. Here's the history of that:

8:3

"For what the law could not do because it was weak through the flesh..."

This is review. The law is spiritual, but I am carnal. Fleshly. The law brought condemnation. I tried to obey, I failed. Judgment was awaiting me and all humanity. The law's problem is that I was unable to obey it because my human nature is opposed to it and has been since Adam and Eve sinned.

The law could not save me or anyone. It is too righteous for me. The Jews in the wilderness trembled at the very voice of the Lord, were terrified at the Presence of God at Sinai. Scary stuff. Please, Moses, you go up and get the commandments yourself. This is too much for us. They were right. And so it was throughout their history and ours.

God wanted a perfect people and he showed them by giving them the law just how perfect He wanted them. But He also showed them they could never be as perfect as the Law described. The law failed to save anyone. But God was not finished with His agenda, which was to have a holy people around Him that love Him at all costs. That was just step one. Step two:

"God [did by] sending His own Son..."

The “did by” has been added by translators, once more trying to help us understand things better. I think it wise to see what Paul actually said. To do so, we need to put the word “God” followed by a comma. What is the verb? What is the action described here? “Sending” is a participle. You will not find a regular action word until the end of the sentence.

God “condemned”. God condemned sin is the entire thought of verse 3. Powerless being the law, God condemned sin, is the broader thought. When the translators rewrote the first part of the verse they had to rewrite the second part to make it match. But the Greek is fine here all by itself. The law being powerless, God condemned sin...

Condemned sin another way. And what was that way? Exactly how did God condemn sin? “Sending His own Son.” The Missionary, the great Apostle from Heaven. The One sent into the world to save sinners. Sent as a spirit? As a “force”? No, His Son took a body. The Word became flesh...

“...in the likeness of sinful flesh...”

Paul, are you suggesting that Jesus *appeared* to be a flesh and blood body like us, but wasn't really? What does this word “likeness” mean?

Homoyomah is the Greek here. A form. Resemblance. A similarity. We've seen this word already in Romans, 6:5, “...united ... in the likeness of His death... we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Jesus died. We die to sin. Jesus was resurrected. We walk in a resurrected life. Same. But not exactly the same in every detail.

Yes, “likeness” can mean an exact copy, but Jesus, in His flesh was not an exact copy according to Paul. Paul adds the word “sinful.”

Jesus' flesh was really like our flesh. Meaning, He was and is fully human. The incarnation means the enfleshing of God Himself in a human body. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This was God's second step.

Law failed because of human flesh, so Jesus came in that same flesh. Flesh like ours in every respect, except sin.

His flesh was tempted as our flesh is tempted, but He was without sin. Hebrews 4:15, He will appear a second time on the earth, without sin still. Hebrews 9:28, His flesh was in the likeness of sinful flesh in that to look at His body you would not see anything different in Him than in all other earthlings. His fleshly body functioned like ours does. But He was without sin.

Some suggest here that sin is not a part of being human. Yet all have sinned. I yield to the theologians to work this one out. Important: Jesus was sinless at birth and all the way to His death.

How can it be that Jesus, born of God, but born of a woman of Adam's fallen race, could have no sin? The Catholic answer: Mary was made immaculate – sinless – at her birth. Sinless. So she could give birth to a sinless Son. They call this the Immaculate Conception. That answer did not come by way of revelation but by theorizing and speculation and logic.

But there was an Immaculate Conception. Not of Mary. Of Jesus. Somehow, God's Seed in Jesus eradicated the sin produced by Mary's part of the equation, and created a holy human seed. Unheard of, since Adam, that one would come into this world perfect. But it happened. A part of the miracle of Emmanuel, God with us.

So what do we have? "Powerless being the law, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh..."

"... and for [on account of, of, as an offering for, for the sake of, to deal with] sin."

I have included in brackets all the other possible renderings that modern translators have added to the text. Most often the idea of an offering for

sin is included to help us understand exactly how God did what He did through Jesus. Nevertheless, there are only three words in the two Greek texts I have available to me. Three words translated simply, as the KJV “and for sin.”

The word for “for” here is the key. It is not the normal word translated that way, but rather “*peri*” which means generally “with respect to”, “concerning”. Paul uses the word often in his letters. Here in Romans 1:3, concerning Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 7:1, concerning the things whereof you wrote. 8:4, concerning the eating of certain foods. 16:1, concerning the collection of the saints.

So what did God do? He sent His Son. How? In the likeness of sinful flesh. Why? That was about sin, concerning sin. He came to deal with sin powerfully. I’m not denying that Jesus offered His life, but there is no basis in this text for that idea to be added. It is simply stated that Jesus came to this earth for sin. What about that? What did He do?

“[He] condemned sin in the flesh,”

MacArthur: “The law can condemn the sinner but only God can condemn and destroy sin.”

Jesus came in sinless flesh to condemn sin in that flesh, which happens to be the same as our own flesh. Adam was created perfect but allowed the virus of sin to overtake his body. He passed that virus on to humanity.

Jesus, because He was God in the flesh, also started with a sinless body, overcame sin every step of the way, and then offered that sinless body as a sacrifice for all humanity, paying the debt that sin demanded, defeating sin and Satan, and passed on that sinlessness to all who will receive Him.

Jesus broke sin’s power when He paid the price, fulfilled the Law and its demands, and then sent His very Spirit inside His people. Sin is condemned forever. It lives as a memory and a threat only in us, but one

day sin, the sinner, death, all will be cast into the Lake of Fire, because of the one righteous act of Jesus the sin-bearer.

He Who knew no sin became sin, then allowed the fury of heaven to come upon Him, for God hates sin with a passion we cannot imagine. It is unfathomable love, an indescribable action, what took place on that hillside. We can't figure it all out, but we can know that sin and its Master have been defeated and we must live in that victory He won. He speaks more about the Spirit's part in all this in the next verse.

8:4

“that the righteous requirement of the law...”

“Righteous requirement” here is two words in the NKJV, but only one in the KJV and Greek, and another word altogether in modern translations. The word means a statute or a decision reached under the law. What the law demands or requires. More than just “justice” but the very specific justice that God has in mind when He says something. You can see why some translators thought “righteousness” while others wanted to have the idea of a “requirement” and why the NKJV wanted both, just to be sure you got the idea.

The Law of God is to be obeyed. It will be obeyed. Fully. There was the obedience of the Son that was without measure. Full free perfect obedience to everything God said, day by day. Many want to leave it there. Well, Jesus kept the Law so I don't have to be under God's law any longer. He nailed that to the cross, right? Colossians 2:14, Jesus “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us... He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Done! Nothing to worry about, let's go take in some basketball and eat and drink and watch commercials.

Not so fast. The old attempt to keep the Law is finished. Striving in our own flesh to please God, that is finished. But if you read on in Colossians

2, you see some familiar talk about dying with Christ, being raised with Christ, having a life hidden with Christ, members dead, putting on a new man. Our Christian experience does not end when we realize that Christ died for our sins.

“... might be fulfilled in us.”

What? I thought that this was all about Christ's obedience, not mine. Christ's victory over sin, not mine. Well, you think wrong. The justice, the fulfillment of the law of God, the righteous requirements of God's holy law, all take place inside of us. Jesus began the process in His death and resurrection and ascension but continues it in the pouring out of His life at Pentecost, into the collective life of the Church.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, the “us” of this passage, the law is daily being fulfilled. There is a true people of God that make God happy every day. Are you and I a part of that? Here's how it happens:

“...who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Of course we understand here that “walk” is a word that is taken both literally and figuratively in Scripture. From Genesis we find men walking with God, though we know it was not about legs and feet. Enoch walked with God. He was in fellowship with God, and went where God went. The Israelites were told not to walk in the way of the pagans around them. They were not to travel with them, be associated with them. David says he will walk in God's truth. He will go where truth goes. Isaiah says that one day the remaining nations of earth will voluntarily walk in the light of the Lord, walk in His paths, go where God goes.

So this verse now talks of our life in the Lord. It is described as a walk, a journey. We can travel where the flesh, our old desires and sin nature, leads us, or we can go where the Spirit is going. Paul says that a Christian is one who walks with God. A relationship like this is not left for a few

special people. All God's people walk according to, or after, or in accord with, the Spirit.

Before Christ comes in, remember, there is one choice. The flesh. Everything we do, no matter how nice it looks, how moral or holy it seems, is somehow connected with the desires of sinful humanity. Our good deeds bring us to pride. Our charity brings us to boasting. In my flesh there is no good thing. I cannot please God until God Himself lives in me.

So the Spirit moves in. He has a totally different agenda from my flesh. Whatever He does in me is not to bring praise to me but to Him. My acts in Him are not self-serving but God-serving. He explains more in the verses to follow.

8:5

"For those who live according to the flesh..."

Notice that "live" and "walk" are used interchangeably. Your walk with God is simply your life with God. Those who are dominated by flesh, whether the unsaved or the fleshly Christian [of which many deny the existence]...

"...set their minds on the things of the flesh,"

Those who have been in this race very long are reminded immediately of this apostle's words to the people of Colossae, 3:2-3, "Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Notice in Colossians the dual teaching. 1) Yes, you are dead. Yes, you are hidden with Christ. Yes, the old is passed away, he says elsewhere. Yes, all things are new. But, nevertheless, the command, 2) Deliberately set your mind in the right direction. Meaning it is still possible to set it in the wrong direction.

This teaching brings distress to those who thought that they could put their life in cruise control, and God would just automatically bring them home. On the way, they can just enjoy the scenery. No gas pedal, no brake. Just have a nice trip. See you in Heaven.

Paul goes on in Colossians to tell the church to put to death their members. After just telling them they died. Both teachings need to be out there. It is possible now to be free from sin. Before, it wasn't possible. But there is a responsibility we carry to be sure our death to sin remains in the tomb with Jesus.

Notice the phrase "set their minds." That's from *froneho*. The KJV simply has "mind" but the later translations wanted you to understand the Greek idea better. It has to do with exercising the mind, or forming an opinion, being mentally disposed to a certain direction. The very same word is used in Colossians 3:1, where the KJV says, "Set your affection..."

The mind is programmable. Animals' minds are programmed from the Manufacturer. They must act a certain way. We call it instinct or nature. People not only have greater minds, they have the capacity to direct that mind in any number of ways. Your mind from birth was being fed information that led it to act in a self-centered way. Everything we do is geared to love ourselves in some way, to take care of number one.

That is called "living according to the flesh." It's the easiest thing in the world. If it feels good, you do it. If it doesn't feel good, but you have to do it anyway, you do it grudgingly and with complaints. When possible, you don't do it at all if it feels bad. Many have understood the Christian life, since it is associated with freedom, to be a life free of difficulty, free of care, free even of work and responsibility. "No bondage" they will cry out when you try to call them to duty of any kind.

"... but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

The setting of the mind is implied in both parts of this verse. We can “set” our minds on fleshly things or on things of the Spirit. This is sad news to those who believe that somehow the Spirit is going to do all the “setting” or “minding.” They falsely assume that they have no responsibility to live a godly life, that God is going to do it all for them.

It is true that all credit, all glory, will go to God in the end, when your life begins to look like Christ’s life, when your words are Christ’s words, when your thoughts are Christ’s thoughts. It is God working in you, for sure, to will and to do. But the commands keep coming to you also. Where do they come from? From God. The power is God’s also, when you set your mind to do these things.

But the setting of the mind is yours. I’m going to say a bad word now. We usually tell all children to cover their ears when bad words are being said. So, now. Those who are children in faith, immature in the Lord, need to cover their ears, because they find this D-word I am about to say very offensive. Some have been known to walk away from the Lord altogether when He mentions it, because it sounds like works and legalism, even though you can see from passages like the one in front of us that we do indeed bear a part of the burden for our holiness.

Ears covered? The word is... Discipline. Ouch. I saw faces contorted, eyes flinching, hair standing on end. Some are saying, how could he mention such a thing?

The discipline of the setting of the mind, the setting of the affections, is a serious one, a crucial one. A man without discipline is a man of confusion and chaos. A man without discipline is a man at sea with no coast in sight. The undisciplined man will never see the coastland of fruitfulness or productivity, the land of holiness and stability. He will float and flit all of his life.

The discipline of the setting of the mind might look like this. Upon arising in the morning, the disciplined saint reaches for a Bible or walks to the

place of prayer, after whatever waking-up he needs to initiate. He begins to praise God with spontaneous or written songs or Bible verses from the Psalms. He feeds on heavenly things before he feeds on anything material.

In this way the sail is set for the craft that must make its way through the currents of the day. Attacks that are launched by the other side, winds of teaching or blasts of insult or irritation, are much more easily navigated because the mind has been set by another Captain in another world. The vision is clear. The direction is set.

By contrast, the fleshly man awakens to the sounds of the world, rushes to the TV or computer to find out what's going on in the world, has a conversation with a family member, reads the newspaper or magazine telling everything he wants to know about Satan's Kingdom. He is minded, or set, for a day of blending in with the world. When he goes to his office or workplace he is armed with the world's information, the world's attitudes, the world's opinions. Clashes occur and problems arise and the un-set, un-disciplined man fends off the weapons formed against him with the arm of flesh on which he has been feeding all morning.

"Setting" the mind can be compared to tuning in a radio station. All you have to do to get the frequency that you want is to turn a dial one way or the other. On your way to that station you're looking for there are many other stations vying for your attention. But you turn past them until you start to hear, faintly at first, then in full strength, the music or the news you are looking for. So it is with the setting of the dial of the Spirit. The enemy will have been working through the night, along with your old carnality, to scare you with dreams, or wake you up with this or that issue. When you do wake up you will be tempted to go a hundred different directions. So it is your responsibility to tune in. Just turn that dial towards prayer or the Word, no matter how unreal it seems at first. Soon you will be hearing the sounds of Heaven, and your day will take on the meanings God intends for it.

Now, regarding the Spirit in the book of Romans. MacArthur points out that He is mentioned only one time in the first seven chapters of the book, and close to twenty times in chapter eight alone. The book has been dealing largely with the old ways. The old law, the old covenant, the old slave-master, the old marriage partner, the old sins. But now, there dawns on this book and on us, the new way. The better way. The way of the Spirit. Make no mistake, the New Covenant is not just another set of rules, that are even harder to obey than the first set. The New Covenant is life, not death. We need to pay attention as he shows us the difference.

One other point needs to be made here. The man of God will mind the things of the Spirit. I, with Paul, give out directives about the Spirit-filled walk, but the fact is, eventually the man who is called of God will live this way. Paul is describing a Christian in this passage. He may struggle as in chapter 7, but he will live this way, or he was not one of us to begin with.

8:6

“For to be carnally minded is death...”

Have you seen all the uses of “for” in this chapter? Verses 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 29, 38. They all start with “for”, “because.” Paul continues to be the lawyer here, used of the Holy Spirit to make a case in the courtroom of life. Listen to his evidence. Each “for” introduces another reason why what he says is true.

- No condemnation, *because* Jesus’ Spirit has made me free.
- Jesus made me free *because* of what he did on Calvary.
- The requirement of the law is fulfilled in us, *because* God’s people set their minds on Jesus.

And here in verse 6, we set our minds on Jesus *because* those who don’t, walk in death.

We're talking in this chapter about saved and unsaved. Carnal vs spiritual. Those who walk in the Spirit vs those who walk in the flesh. We saw in chapter 7 a man of God struggling against sin even as a believer. But in chapter 8, Paul is making another point. And in doing so he is contrasting the man who always walks in the flesh with the man who walks in the Spirit, even though struggling.

We understand from 7 that sin is still alive, and we must be on our guard through the Spirit. We understand from 8 that we have entered a totally different existence from the man of this world.

To be carnally minded will not bring a person one day to death. That situation *is* death, now. A person who is constantly in the flesh is not a child of God. He is dead spiritually. A person who loves the things of this world supremely, satisfies himself constantly, thinks only of his own needs, is walking in death now and will be separated from God in eternal death. Don't be fooled by external habits he may have acquired. His Sunday walk may not be his Monday walk. We're not talking about the struggler here. We're talking about the one who has never experienced the things of God in His life. He is totally governed by the flesh. He is not saved.

"... but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

We must not claim to be full of God's Spirit if our life is not producing living things. If our life is not at peace. The Spirit produces life. Now. Not hopefully, someday we'll go to Heaven. When we set our minds on God and He is controlling us, we are not worried about everything. We aren't letting words of death enter our conversation. We live. We spread life around us wherever we go. Peace enters the room when we enter it.

Notice Paul is giving a description here, not a formula. These are not rules about how to be spiritually minded. He's saying that the spiritually minded person has by definition, life and peace. It can't be any other way. Why is this all true? Verse 7.

8:7

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God...”

Again, not a formula. Not, If you keep being carnal you’re going to wind up as an enemy of God. Rather, from the day you were born in that fleshly body, you inherited from Adam the state of enmity. Your mind began very early to figure out that you were the center of the universe. Being the center, you were against anything that threatened your sovereignty. You didn’t know about God early on, but it didn’t matter. You mattered. If you could have picketed as a child, you would have carried a sign everywhere that said, “My life matters. Yours doesn’t.” You see on the streets today similar attitudes.

Up with me. Down with everything that doesn’t please or benefit me. That’s the disease of humanity. And it makes a person a sworn enemy of God. When the Word of God comes to a person bound by self, it is immediately rejected unless it sounds like it might uplift self. We tell people, God loves you. You are special. God has a plan for your life. And the carnal man jumps at all of that, because it feeds the narrative, even though the enemy said it.

But tell a person the rest of the story. All people sin. You are a people. You have sinned. Without Christ there is no way you can live forever with God. You are lost. Tell them that, and the response is quite different. The carnal mind is at enmity with God. You will see living evidence of this truth every time you tell an unsaved person the truth about himself.

“for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

Paul touches on a subject here that he will improve on later, but it is worthy of note that Paul says here that no one is capable of being saved in their own person. He already has told us that in our flesh is no good thing. This is a confirmation of that truth. The man who has not yet been

touched by the Spirit of God can never obey God. Which means, can never be saved. That's called depravity. Utterly, hopelessly lost without Christ. An entire race, like the human race before the flood, bound for judgment. Unable to hear and obey God. Natural-born enemies, just as certain species of animals grow up knowing that certain other animals are to be feared and avoided, or eaten for lunch.

Are there few that will be saved? Jesus asked that. Our tendency is to think that eventually there will be a huge majority saved and only the very worst in hell. But if you had been asked that in pre-flood days, and answered like that, you would have been quite mistaken. Eight people out of how many? I saw an estimate of somewhere between 750 million and 4 billion. (People lived longer in those days...)

Eight people. Four billion people.

We have nearly eight billion today. Maybe sixteen will be saved? No, there are innumerable people who John saw coming out of the great tribulation. There will be many people, taken as a group, in heaven. But compared to eight billion on earth?

The point is, the human person comes into this world, and for the most part leaves this world, as an enemy of God. What is your status? Forget for the moment words like saved and sanctified and Holy Ghost filled and Christian. Are you a friend of God? Am I a friend of God?

Paul makes a summary statement in verse eight that is intended to raise eyebrows, but really is no different than what he has been saying:

8:8

“So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Little words and shades of meaning can mean a lot in a passage. Paul said in the last chapter, I am carnal. I am fleshly. I am a human being, is all that

means. He is not saying that here. He is not saying, Those who are flesh cannot please God. He says, Those who are *in the flesh* cannot please God.

What's the difference between being flesh and being in the flesh? We already saw it above. 7:25 says that it is the flesh with which we serve the law of sin. The flesh and blood body is the servant of sin or can be the servant of righteousness. Being flesh and blood itself is not the problem; Jesus was flesh and blood. The first Adam was flesh and blood. But that flesh and blood body is the tool that Satan and sin use to get us into bondage.

8:1 tells us more of the same. The flesh and blood body is not the issue but the fact that we listen to that body's dictates, the body that is being used by sin. He calls it "walking" according to the flesh.

8:5 says that not only do many people serve the flesh and walk in the flesh, they live according to the flesh, and set their minds on the flesh. They are in fact fleshly- or carnally-minded. That's what it means to be in the flesh. Dominated by, attuned to, in fellowship with, guided by things that are of this earth, things that revolve around me and my personal needs. If that describes you, you cannot please God. You either need to get saved, or repent. The Heavens don't bow down to you, you must bow down to the Heavens. Get over it. The earth only needs one God, and it's not you.

So, if you are in the flesh, trouble, but

8:9

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you."

That's a huge statement. That's a turning point in Romans. The way out is described here. The way to no condemnation described in verse 1. A lot of important words in that sentence.

"You." Spoken to the believers at Rome and believers everywhere. He's not reversing the human condition here by saying that, all along in this letter I've been leading up to a new philosophy. In fact it's just the way you use words that makes the difference here. "Humans are not really dominated by flesh, they are a spiritual person..."

...This is the lie that is so prevalent today. "Sure we have flaws, but deep inside of man there is good. Every man has a spiritual nature that simply needs to be discovered and animated and encouraged. We all want the same good things, even the worst of us. Even the Bible says we were made in God's image."

No. In this fleshly human creature, before Christ enters, there is no good thing. We have already established that. Humans as they are, are hopeless and helpless. There's got to be something more or we are condemned. That something, that Someone, is the Spirit of God. Not our own spirit, but His. A visitation from Heaven. A filling up of an empty vessel. An anointing from on high. A baptism in Spirit that corresponds to our baptism of water. Buried in Him.

Before Christ enters, you are in the flesh. You have no choices. No matter which way you turn it is the flesh that is dictating every move. Now, Paul says, enters the Spirit. Though you still dwell in that flesh and blood body, you are in The Spirit and the Spirit in you. That's an accomplished fact. Not something you strive for, though you want more and more submission to Him. Once He enters, He is there, so now it can be said you are in Him.

The flesh? We've already seen in several ways that there is a battle going on. Flesh nature is still there, trying to take its old place. There are even

setbacks where this seems to be the case. But the child of God gets up and yields anew to the Spirit of God and continues his journey.

The most important word of verse 9 may be the word “if.” It’s clearly what it seems to be. A word that denotes conditionality. If the Spirit does not live in you, you are in the flesh. Period. If the Spirit lives in you, you are in the Spirit. Period. It comes down to this in Paul’s thinking, which we believe is the Holy Spirit’s word. And if that first statement does not convince you, he goes on to repeat it in the end of this verse.

“Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

“But” is probably better than “now” here, since it is the same Greek word that starts this verse. If the Spirit is in you, you are not in the flesh, but if anyone... etc

This is so critical a verse. So crucial to everything spiritual in our lives. Heaven and hell are in this verse. Do you have the Spirit? Then you have victory over the flesh. Do you have the Spirit? Then you belong to Jesus. Do you have the Spirit? Then you can please God.

No Spirit of God? No pleasing God. No ownership by Jesus. No victory over the flesh. You’ll just keep living like you’ve been living, and eventually wind down to eternal loss.

You say, I don’t know if I have the Spirit. I got saved, but I don’t know if the Spirit came inside me. Let’s turn the verse around a minute. If you are His, you have the Spirit. Are you saved? Then you are His. If you are His, you have the Spirit. You say, I heard there was something more, later. More, yes. More of the same Spirit. We’re not talking about the “more” right now. We’re asking, do you have the initial deposit?

In the West for many years we have taught people to “say a sinner’s prayer.” Or, “Ask Jesus to come into your heart.” Now I ask you, how could Jesus come into your heart without the Holy Spirit being there?

Jesus told His disciples, I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you. Did he? Yes, on the day of Pentecost. He came through the Spirit. Let's approach it a different way. Has there been a change in your life? Are you producing fruit? Then you have the Spirit. Did you confess your sins to Him and believe that He had forgiven those sins? Then you have the Spirit. The evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is a spiritual life, a life lived close to God.

Notice here how the terms "Spirit" [in verses 1, 2, 4, 5], along with "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ", and just "Christ" are all used interchangeably in this chapter. Don't be saying any longer, "Jesus is in my heart, but I'm not sure about the Spirit." Impossible thinking. You can't have Jesus without having the Spirit of Jesus, who is the Holy Spirit.

You can read this verse to say, as it reads in the English, No Spirit means no Jesus. Or you can take it the other way. It's impossible for you to be claiming you are His and walking with Him as you have been, without having the Spirit. Of course you have the Spirit.

Nevertheless it is good to let this word from Paul challenge you to test yourself, look at your life, examine your history with God. Was there a time when you know that God Himself entered your very being? Not when you went forward in a meeting, necessarily. Not when you understood some Scripture, necessarily. Not when God answered a prayer of yours, necessarily. Not when you went down into the water. But a moment when sins were confessed, sins were forgiven, and the load was lifted? Saved from sin?

Paul echoes this self-testing mechanism, this self-confrontation, in 2 Corinthians 13:5, where he says, "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless you fail the test." That is, unless you ask yourself, am I really saved, and the answer comes back negative from the start. That's when it is time to ask Christ into your heart, and settle this thing.

Salvation is the fruit that is not being talked about today in this age of the miraculous. People are expecting signs and wonders to happen to them, and a mighty wind to blow over them, and fire to appear in the sky, when God wants you to hear a still small but overwhelmingly powerful voice speak into your ear, I love you, I died for you, I forgive you fully, follow Me. Come to Me, I will give you rest. When you've heard that voice, the Spirit of God is in you. Everything else is a plus, and let it happen. More Lord!

But what Paul is talking about here is the entrance of a Person Who begins in you a victorious battle over the flesh. The person Who more than evens up the sides, he puts you in charge of your body, that body of death. Gives you a new heart and mind and direction.

8:10

"And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin..."

See again, that to say "Christ is in you" is the same as to say, the "Spirit of Christ" (v. 9) is in you, which is the same as to say, "the Spirit of God" (also v. 9) or just "the Spirit." The Triune God is in you if you have asked Him into your heart.

There's a little word in the Greek here that most translators ignored for reasons of their own. It is *men*. It means "indeed." The Catholic Rheims translation reads, "the body indeed is dead..."

What does Paul's idea communicate to us? Christ is in you, yes? Is your body dead? If it were, you could not read this page. Must mean a different kind of death. In fact, Paul has already given us this teaching in chapter 7 and before. 7:24, remember, refers to this "body of death" from which we need to be delivered. How did our body become a body of death? 7:9-11. The law comes to us, sin is aroused in us, we die. Sin uses the law of God to deceive me and kill me. 6:11 tells us we are to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin, alive to Christ.

So this is not new. Once Christ comes in, a death takes place. The old nature is still there but we have died to it. The body of death hangs on to us but we do not have to give it our service any longer. Dead to sin. Dead body. Lots of death going on, but the good news is

“but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

This is another of those statements that can go over our heads. We understand all of the individual words: (S)pirit, life, righteousness. But how they are tied together here is something we need to examine.

First look at the parallel in the last statement. Body, death, sin. See how they are tied together? Sin produces death to the body. We are all under that curse from Adam. Even having Christ in us will not take away that fact. These bodies are dying as we speak and will go back to dust. But there is another dynamic in us now, because of Christ.

Sin produces death. Righteousness produces life. Now we learned earlier in the book that it is not a righteousness of our own that produces life. Human efforts at keeping the law failed altogether. But now, 3:21-22, the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... faith in Jesus Christ and His work on Calvary.

What God did for you on the cross, produces life in the spirit.

Now a word about capital letters. You all know, I hope, that when capital letters appear in your Bible, they are not there by inspiration. “All of the Greek New Testament originals were written in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS with no spaces and probably no punctuation, and all of the earlier manuscripts are in this style, whether on parchment or papyrus.” (from friktech.com)

This applies to the Greek texts that gave us the KJV and the ones that gave us more modern translations. All capitals. But we don't write that way today. So who decided which letters should remain capitalized? The

translators. And on what basis? Context and sound judgment and present-day understandings of Biblical truth.

So, for example, when you see the word “God” in the Bible it is almost always capitalized because the word refers to the one true God. But not always. Sometimes it is referring to pagan deities, not worthy of the honor of a capital letter. The same with words like “savior” and “lord”. Depends on the context.

So we come to the word “Spirit”. In the Bible there are at least three usages of that word. The Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirits of the evil one. Two of those three meanings are here in chapter 8, and knowing which is which will make the text flow easier for you.

Please understand also that to speak of the human spirit is not a lowly reference. We were dead in trespasses and sin. Our bodies were alive. Our souls were alive. But that part of us that communicates with truth, with God, was dead. So if some of these Roman verses are referring to the human spirit, it is a spirit that is touched by God, but in my opinion does not deserve the capital letter.

I think that both ideas are contained in verse 9, for example. You are not controlled by flesh but by spirit, small “s”, if indeed the Spirit of God, capital “S”, dwells in you. So also here in verse 10. If Christ is in you, the body is dead, but the spirit (your spirit) is alive. Do you see how that makes the verse flow better? A perfect parallel. Sin produces death in your body. Christ produces life in your spirit. He goes on then to use the capitalized Spirit talking about the One who makes your spirit come to life.

(For the record, most translations of our day do make that distinction in verse 10, using a small “s”. Some even in verse 9.)

8:11

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...”

Notice the “if” again, as the two “if’s” in verse 9. What is to follow is conditional on the Spirit living inside of you. Examine yourselves. Be very sure.

Notice also here that it is the Spirit that is given credit for raising Jesus from the dead. In 6:4, it is the “glory of the Father” that is given that credit. We are all clueless as to the inner workings of the Triune God, the three-in-one. But in some way, what one Person of the Trinity does, all three do. “Let ‘Us’ make man in our own image,” said the Father to the Son (we presume) way back in Genesis.

“He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies...”

As in 6:4, we want to think the final resurrection here. There will be a final resurrection for sure, with totally renewed bodies, for sure. But Paul is not teaching that doctrine in 6:4 or here. He’s talking about the beginning of that resurrection process. The resurrection, the new life, for us, begins with a resurrected spirit. Jesus said, you must be born again, born from above. The Holy Spirit touches our spirit, regenerates us, gives us a life we did not have in the flesh.

That action takes place by way of the same Spirit that hovered over the tomb of the dead body of Jesus. Notice that Jesus was not just a resuscitated corpse. He was raised with a glorified Body, with the glory He had before the world began. As far as His sojourn here was concerned, there was something new added.

Paul says that that addition of a new person is to happen to you also. Here. Now. In these mortal bodies, the very Spirit of a living God remains.

“through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

So verse 11 becomes a summary of the preceding verses and leads to the conclusion of verse 12. You can't please God ever, living in the flesh. So, besides the conquest of sin at Calvary, God sends His own Spirit inside of you so you can live the holy life He is calling you to. This new life is a foretaste of the great resurrection of our bodies that comes at the end. All things are new. God himself lives in me. The Spirit of God IS God. Therefore...

8:12

"Therefore, brothers, we are debtors – "

Paul has already told us we are not under condemnation. He's told us of life in the Spirit. It is clear that Jesus has paid the debt of sin we owed and could not pay. We are free men now. Why bring up the subject of indebtedness here? We need to understand that, even though we don't have that old master that was bringing us to hell, we still have a master. We are not our own, ever. We were the devil's. Now we are Christ's. We were bound to Satan. Now we are bound in love to Christ. We owed a debt we could never pay and non-payment meant eternal Hell.

We still owe a debt we can never repay, but payment is not accepted as long as we remain aware of what He has given us freely. As long as we respond in love to Him and those around us. As long as we remember to pass on the mercy that was extended to us.

"not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."

That is all true, but it seems that the main reason he brought up the subject was to show what we are not in debt to. The flesh. You owe your carnal nature nothing. What does that look like? Indebtedness to the flesh?

Do you ever catch yourself saying, I've been doing so well these days, I deserve a little distraction? The word "deserve" is the signal. I owe myself.

Or worse, you owe me. Hey, I've been good to you. I deserve a little credit. I work so hard, I deserve a little more attention. I deserve some extra junk food. Paul would say, you owe your flesh nothing. You owe God everything.

Can you remember all the way back to chapter 1, verse 14? Paul says, I am in debt to everyone. I owe them the Gospel that was given freely to me. Not to put bondage on us, but it is true that we are in debt to every person we meet that is outside of Christ. Or that is suffering for Christ. Or that is needing a word of encouragement. Or that is needing assistance with an overwhelming task. We owe them.

8:13

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die...”

But right away you say, Hey, I'm going to die anyway. Everybody dies. Paul and other Bible writers, and Jesus Himself, define death differently than we do. God said to Adam and Eve that on the day they partook of that fruit, they would die. And they did. And they passed death on to all. You too were dead in trespasses and sins, says Paul.

“But I was never dead”. Yes, Biblically, you were dead. The real death is a separation from God. All those who do not know Jesus Christ through the Spirit of God are dead, no matter how much they move their bodies around.

You were in this state before Christ. And those who choose to remain in that state will continue in death. You would have died eternally. For there is another stage to Biblical death, and that is when you are separated forever from the possibility of forgiveness and the love and mercy of God. Dead now, but eternally dead then, if the flesh is your choice.

Some would see in this passage an open door to the possibility of losing one's salvation. Then what do we do with the first verse of the chapter?

We would have to explain it away, and that is never healthy. The first verse, remember says there is no condemnation if you are in Christ Jesus. Remember the big if here, repeated in verse 9. If the Spirit of God is in you, you are not in the flesh. If you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you are in the flesh.

Back to verse 1. Let's define those who are "in Christ Jesus" again. What does it mean, Paul? It means, those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. If Christ is in us, we do not obey the flesh any longer, verse 12. If we lived in the flesh, we would be on our way to death, back to verse 13.

In God's eyes there is a clear-cut difference between a man of flesh and a man of the Spirit. You are either one or the other. Do you know who you are? Do you follow the promptings of the Spirit? Is God and Christ and His church what your life is about? You are in the Spirit, you will not die that second death, that separation from God forever.

"but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Now we are receiving another clue about how this Christian life, this New Covenant life, works. He's told us, Don't let sin reign in your body! Stop obeying the lusts! You are not under the law! Live like a person who is under grace! Be a slave of righteousness! Be dead to the law. Don't be carnally minded!

Paul, how do I do this? How can I, weak as I am in my natural man, deal a death blow to all these bad things I have done all my life? What's the secret? What's the magic formula? I want to live.

Those are questions that perhaps a new seeker will ask as he views the claims of Jesus Christ. God Himself will put those questions inside. I've been such a sinner, Lord. How can I live this life that these Christians are talking about? It's just so far above me.

Of course, the answer has already been given in this chapter, but the message is clear here. It's by the Spirit that all this magic is wrought. You can't do this on your own. The Spirit comes in and together you are a mighty team, cutting down one enemy after another.

Many are the testimonies of men who were chain smokers and then were not smokers at all. In an instant, by the Spirit of God. Alcoholics who can't stand the smell or taste of that wicked brew any longer. Perverts whose minds were changed in an instant.

Other enemies remain in the land for some. The battle is not meant to be won in all fields at one time, so we will remember a war is raging. The children of Israel had spectacular miraculous victories at first coming into Canaan. Then God turned things over to them, or so it seemed. By God's grace and providence, the victories kept coming. It looked on the outside like these Israelites were supermen.

So it will be with you. You will be enabled to cut down one enemy one day, one the next, and maybe you will fight with a third enemy all your life, but by the Spirit we will put to death every foul deed of this human body, and in doing so with the Spirit, we will live. And why? Paul now answers,

8:14

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Do you see the flow of these two verses? Why are you not in the flesh-death pattern any longer? Why is the Spirit in you, leading you to victory over the deeds of your body? Why are you alive and not dead, spiritually? Because [for] a person that's led like this by the Spirit, to overcome, is actually a son or daughter of God Himself. Let that sink in. Look at your life. Is this a description of you? Overcoming sin on a regular basis? That means you are a true son or daughter. That's evidence you have been born into the family. You belong.

Did you know that when God directed you to read your Bible and pray, you were being led of the Spirit? Did you understand that when you had that need to talk to a brother or sister in Christ about your struggles in the Christian life, that was being led of the Spirit? Did you know that that joy you feel about being in the house of God was the leading of the Spirit? Did you know that when you had the courage to say no to that evil that has hounded you for years, that you were being led of the Spirit?

Don't make this a spooky thing. Don't look for dreams and visions and weird happenings. To be led of the Spirit is to hear within you a Voice that directs you into the paths of God. And your hearing of that inner direction from God, connected to the written Word of God, is the leading of the Spirit and proof of your membership in the true church.

8:15

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear...”

Paul talked earlier of bondage. That was in chapter 6. If you submit to a master, you are that master's slave. If sin is your master, you head towards death. But you were freed from that master. This new master is not like that. The new master is God Himself. You have become a child of God. Though it is true that Jesus is our Lord, the picture Paul is painting here is for another reason.

First a look at the word “fear.” He hasn't brought up the fear factor in his letter yet. But he talks as though fear was truly a part of the old way. He says the new way is not bondage. It's not cruel slavery. It's not about cowering in fear before God any longer. It's not about condemnation. It's not about pending doom and judgment. These are real entities in the world, but they are not yours any longer, if Christ is in you and you have experienced His forgiveness. Nothing to be afraid of. Lift your head up. Take courage.

We see the people of the world during the day. They seem happy enough. Productive. Enjoying life to some measure. They seem confident. But if you could look deep inside, and in fact, if you care to take a look at your old nature, you just might see a well-concealed irritating, gnawing concern about the future. Not just the future on earth. But the future after life is over here. What's really out there? Are these Christians right? Is there a price to pay for disobeying God? Is hell real? Is there a judgment from a God who is still angry with me?

As Peter Marshall said, "In the sunshine of life it seems so remote but the truth is we are afraid of death. We lack the freedom and release that comes from taking Jesus at His Word and fearing not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul..."

We inherited that fear from the one who also gave us sin. Adam. That's the principle that is in us now, in our flesh. It rises up when bad times come, emergencies arise. We may not think of it often otherwise, but it is there, a tormentor if we allow it to be. But Paul says, that can be a part of your past now. God has given you something to overcome the bondage to sin and death and the fear of death,

"but you received the Spirit of adoption..."

Adoption does not sound as good to American ears as it did to the ears of Roman citizens of Paul's day. I quote directly from MacArthur's commentary on Romans:

"In the Roman culture of Paul's day... an adopted child... sometimes had greater prestige than the natural children. According to Roman law, a father's rule over his children was absolute. If he was disappointed in his natural sons' skill, character, or any other attribute, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired... at the death of the father, a favored adopted son would sometimes inherit the father's title, the major part of the estate, and would be the primary progenitor of the family name..."

Now our Heavenly Father is not disappointed in Jesus, His Son. But if His Son is truly living in us, we are swept into the dignity of being heirs of a great estate, wearing the family name, totally favored and approved by the Father. Adoption is no small thing.

Moses was adopted. Esther was adopted. But MacArthur points out that perhaps Mephibosheth gives us the most perfect picture of our own adoption in Christ. Mephibosheth was the crippled grandson of David's enemy, Saul. His very name means "shameful thing" and he lived in Lodebar, which means a "barren land." Is this not who we were before Christ filled us with Himself? Shameful in our sins, living in the barren land of rebellion against the God of all creation?

David had a high regard for any son of Jonathan, his best friend, even though Jonathan was a son of Saul, his worst enemy. He invited the poor cripple to his very table, called him his own, brought him into full fellowship with the royal family. All the things that our David has done for us, poor crippled sinners. No longer crippled and barren but seated at the table of the King. That's adoption of the highest order.

"by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"

This is the informal Aramaic term for Father. It is used by children, but not only children. Jesus used it in the Garden of Gethsemane, crying out to His heavenly parent for the cup to be removed from Him. "Dad, Father, all things are possible for You..." When the spirit of adoption comes upon us, that is, when we feel and know the Spirit of God is descending on our spirits we instinctively know that we have a personal relationship with Heaven. We're not afraid to pray. Prayer rises from within us as we become aware of something happening inside. It's just there. That's why in all the conversion stories in the book of Acts, the first thing you hear is people glorifying God with their tongues. Praise just rises up, and is directed to their new friend, their Dad, their Papa.

8:16

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

The first thing we must tackle in this verse, a most important verse, is the pronoun “Himself” as found in most translations of the Bible. The KJV says “Itself.” There is no contradiction in the Greek. The reflexive pronoun is used, a form of *autos*. In English we say him, “himself” or it, “itself.” The words are interchangeable, even the ending of the Greek word gives us no clue. It’s up to the context. If you are talking about some “thing”, you use “it” in the translation. If you are talking about a Person, you use “Him.”

So this is clearly a translator issue. Why did the KJV use the impersonal “it” referring to God the Spirit? Look at the rest of the verse. “Our” spirit is mentioned. Is your spirit, by itself, a person? Notice how I instinctively used “itself” in referring to your spirit. Yet Paul tells us elsewhere that our spirit can pray and sing. Do “things” pray or sing? Only persons do. So technically, our spirit is a person, the new person that has been made alive by Christ. But we still tend to use “it.” There are evil spirits. Angelic spirits. All of them are usually referred to in that impersonal pronoun. Consistently then, the KJV followed suit with the heavenly Spirit.

But the translators almost unanimously had a problem with that. They saw that the Spirit of Romans 8:16 “bears witness.” They knew this was the Spirit of God. One of the three persons of the Trinity. If this is God, a God who is doing something, we cannot call Him an “it.”

Let’s talk next about this “bearing witness” idea. We saw this word in 2:15 and will see it again in 9:1, where Paul talks about his conscience bearing witness with him. It is a joint testimony. One person agreeing with another one, as in a court of law, testifying together that a certain thing is true.

When Jesus was here, according to John 5, he had a number of witnesses testifying on His behalf, that He was true. John the Baptist bore witness to the truth. But greater than that, the Father Himself bore witness by allowing Him to do mighty works, and by speaking from heaven. He bore witness of Himself.

In the case before us, we too are in need of a witness that we are children of God, as Jesus received a witness that He was the Son of God. Paul says that it is the Spirit of God giving testimony in this case. And that witness from heaven is joined together with the spirit that is in us. Two witnesses joining their testimony together to seal the deal.

What does this witness look like or sound like or feel like? The answers to this are as varied as the individual people of God who have experienced it.

For example there is the British pastor Billy Bray from the nineteenth century. He had been a drunk, to put it plainly, with all that that entails. But he read a book of John Bunyan, was joyously converted, and was constantly filled with the joy of the Lord after that, by his own testimony. He said, "I can't help praising the Lord. As I go along the street, I lift up one foot, and it seems to say, 'glory.' And I lift up the other, and it seems to say, 'Amen'. And so they keep on like that all the time I am waking." The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit.

Others look back to that first day, and they will tell you of a glorious experience. In my case I remember seeking the Lord for a closer encounter with God than I had had up to that point. I came through the church called the church of Christ. Lots of Bible doctrine, most of it very good. Water baptism. But my Baptist and Pentecostal friends had testimonies that troubled me. I knew there was more, and I wanted it. Some of my friends would have told me that I was not saved at all, and that I needed that first experience with the Lord.

One night it happened. Total surprise. I'm listening to Billy Graham preach about sin. The message touches me in a way preaching had never touched

me. I begin weeping uncontrollably about my sinfulness. I know Billy is talking about me.

Halfway through this episode I truly believed God had forgiven me of those sins, and the weeping turned into an incredible sense of joy. Laughter. I had never been so happy in my life. The thought came to me, "This is it. This is what you have been praying for. Don't forget this night. Don't forget the total assurance of salvation you have right now." The Spirit of God was bearing witness with my spirit.

Still others may look to a totally changed life. They catch themselves doing things they never dreamed of doing before their coming to Christ and His coming to them. They have a voracious appetite for the Bible. They can't wait to get to church. They are there every possible time. They love God's people. They talk about Jesus to friends. They are kind to their neighbors. And from time to time that little voice inside says, "See? Look at this. This proves you are a child of God. You never did this before." The Spirit of God Himself bears witness, adds his testimony, to our own spirit that we are children of God.

Children. To be a child, you must be born. No, you were not born to the family of Christ when you left your mother's womb. You were born into Adam's race. You are a long lost relative of Adam and Eve. No, it's not true what they say in many churches and on the media, "Hey, we are all children of God." No. Creations of God, but to be a child, you must be born again, from above.

Children grow up to look and act like their parents. As you grow, the Spirit will let you know that you are starting to look like the Heavenly Father and your big brother Jesus. The family resemblances will not be striking at first, but little glimmers of heaven's glory will occasionally be manifest in you.

John adds this startling promise in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God. And it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but

we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him..." That's the adult child, the full growth of the offspring of the Father: We'll be like Jesus fully. Whatever that means. Be sure you have started the process. Ask God to confirm that you are born again.

8:17

"And if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..."

There's that "if" again. One idea builds on another. If Christ is in you, the body is dead, and the Spirit is life. If that Spirit is in you, the one who raised up Jesus will raise you up. If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live, and live as a child of God. And if you are a child of God you are an heir of God.

We do not know much about our eternal spiritual inheritance. What God has prepared for us in the heavens has not been revealed and doesn't need to be yet. But there is a certain planet that we are in line for...

Paul has already talked about it in chapter 4, when he taught us about Abraham, whom he called the "heir of the world." Now that's a nice inheritance to start with, yes? In the seed of Abraham there is one who will bless all nations. But Abraham is called the heir. And Paul says in Galatians 3 that all those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham. He says that if we are Christ's, we are Abraham's seed, and heirs of the same promise.

If you are Christ's. That means that ultimately Christ is the heir. Remember the story of the wicked vinedressers? The owner wanted some fruit from that vine, and sent servants to receive it. They were beaten and killed. Then he sent His only Son, expecting reverence. What was the thought of the wicked ones? "This is the heir." That Son in that story is Jesus. He is the heir, by right. But the love of God has been extended to us through this Jesus. Totally selflessly Jesus says we can be heirs with Him of

this earth. He even promised it in the beatitudes. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Many misled Christians are trying to claim that promise now. They are taught by their mentors to conquer the dominions of earth, enter the political field, and rise to the top. Or enter the field of entertainment and rise to the top. Or enter government and rise to the top. Rising to the top does not sound like the activity of the meek. Jesus said, come to Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. When Jesus came to earth, He did not rise to the top. He conquered nothing. Except sin and death and hell. Our assignment for now is not to conquer but to take up a cross and suffer with Him. The reigning at the top comes later, when Jesus returns to claim His inheritance. Which He will make our inheritance. Joint heirs with Christ,

“if indeed we suffer with Him...”

Let's not color this passage over with excuses. Another “if” is in the text. Suffering is not something we seek or fake. If you are on a pathway to an inheritance with the suffering Jesus, you will suffer. Not with a sore toe or the flu. Not that kind of suffering. Everyone in the world suffers one way or another. The text here and in other places is clear. It is suffering with Him. Jesus and all the apostles He called have set the example. Tortured and killed for the sake of Jesus.

The early church is filled with the horror stories of suffering saints. Most of the church today is connected with suffering because of the name of Jesus being attached to them. There are more Christians in China now than in America. And they suffer. North Korea's suffering has become legendary and awful in its descriptions. If you want a comfortable life in a Muslim land, don't share your faith in Christ successfully. You will suffer and perhaps die. Communism is not dead, even in this hemisphere, and is on the rise. Suffering is our lot. Are we ready? Are we willing to bear this cross, or happy just to talk about it and maybe shed a tear?

All who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. In the first century. No. In the Middle East. No. In Islam. No. All. I leave that out there for us to grapple with. Let us pray that when our time comes, we will not turn away from Christ. And no, regardless of what your views on the rapture are, there is no escape from the cross of Christ. Great tribulation now covers many of the people of God. It is a sign not of the end but of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. And a condition of Jesus' blessing in the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake... great is your reward..."

"that we may also be glorified together."

Most of us understand that persecution is the lot of the Christian. Most of us understand that the glory comes later. A great time is coming when Jesus will call us up to Himself and plant crowns of glory on our heads. We understand those two concepts. But here, Paul joins those two events in a bond that is unbreakable. He uses the word "that" in English, from *hina* which means "in order that", or "for the purpose of."

Have you seen persecution-style suffering in this light? We are suffering with Him for the express purpose of being glorified with Him later. What Paul seems to be saying is that there is no "social promotion" in Heaven. Social promotion is practiced in many public schools these days. We don't want children to be left behind and socially unacceptable to their peers, so no matter how low their scores are at the end of the year, we just pass them on. No matter how awful their academic record for twelve years, we'll let them graduate anyway.

So Graduation Day comes, and the same excitement is generated for this class clown who cannot read or write, as for the serious student who gave it his best. The book of Proverbs frowns heavily on giving honor to fools, but we do it all the time.

Today's education system is intellectually the same as socialism is in the world of economics. In the socialist viewpoint, everyone deserves a house and a food and medical attention, even the laziest among us, the most unproductive. That is called human rights these days. Your Bible says if a man does not work, he does not eat. Period. We're of course talking about able-bodied people who can work.

These two examples of giving a reward to the unworthy are human examples. They don't measure up in Heaven. Let me be quick to say that grace means God does indeed give freely His salvation to unworthy people who deserve nothing. But to those same saved wretches, God says, Follow Me. Work out your salvation. Go make disciples. Take up your cross. You will suffer persecution. Things are going to get rough. Be ready.

And as in the idiot child or the lazy man, glorifying a person in Heaven who has not suffered for Christ on earth, says Paul, doesn't add up. We suffer for the clear purpose of glorification. Jesus suffered and was glorified. The apostles suffered and were made the very foundations of the church. Martyrs have suffered through our history and they are the bright stars surrounding Jesus in glory. Paul goes on now to talk even more about this aspect of the Christian life.

8:18

"For I consider..."

Before we decide exactly what Paul considered, let's take a look at this word consider. It's a term you might find in a math context. It means to estimate, and then conclude. You add up all the facts and you get this or that.

The term "reckon" in the KJV is Old English, yet still used today in the hills. "I reckon so" we say. I guess so. I've thought about it and it makes sense.

But the point we need to see here is that it sounds very much like this is Paul speaking, and not the Lord. Paul opens himself up to this criticism often. Speaking to Timothy, as he informs that young brother about how to put the church in order, he says “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.” A directive from a Spirit-inspired apostle. No quibbling. Then he goes on to say “I” do not permit a woman to teach a man or have any authority over a man. She is to remain quiet.

You do not permit, Paul? Is this just your idea? Personally, I do not like to use the word “just” in connection with any apostle. Paul was given authority by Christ to lay foundational material in the church. When Paul speaks, we should listen. The church suffers when it does not listen to and obey an apostle of Jesus. “Just Paul”? What, “just a Holy-Spirit inspired man of God appointed directly by Jesus Christ” is what you mean?

In 1 Corinthians 7 the words of Paul get a further attack. Speaking to married people he gives a command from the Lord. Don’t separate. Don’t divorce. Thus says the Lord. Then, in the next verses he says, This isn’t the word of the Lord, this is Paul speaking: If an unbeliever leaves a believer, you’re free. Don’t stress over it. No direct command from God, but a word of wisdom from an apostle of Jesus. I’d prefer Paul’s opinion over the opinion of a man who has no authority in the church.

He gives his opinion about the widow or widower at the end of the chapter and suggests that either of them are free to re-marry. Though it might be better if they didn’t. And he adds, tongue-in-cheek: “And I think I have the Spirit of God.”

I say all that to introduce the comment here. This is Paul’s estimate of the situation, based on adding up all the facts known to him at this time in his life. And it turns out that his wisdom has remained intact:

Namely,

“that the suffering of this present time...”

The New Testament was written in a day of persecution. Paul and Peter refer to it in their writings. Jesus predicted it in the Gospels. John saw its final manifestation in the Revelation. You cannot read the New Testament, or the whole Bible, without running into the fact over and over that we have an enemy who hates God, hates the people of God, hates the Son of God, and will do everything in the power granted to him – by God – to destroy us. He loses. We know that. But don't underestimate his wiles, his attempts to bring us down.

What exactly was the “suffering of this present time”? Paul is probably referring to the entire lifetime of the Christian and the Christian Church. This present time is the world we live in at present. But what was going on in the year 56 or so of this present era?

Nero was on the throne of Rome from 54-68 A.D. That was probably the backdrop of this letter. Eventually Paul, says tradition, would die at the hands of this mad ruler.

From Unger's Bible dictionary: His mother was the sister of Caligula, another mad Roman Emperor who reigned in the early days of the book of Acts (37-41). Both of these men started out well enough but something seemingly demonic got hold of them while sitting on the Emperor's chair.

He was extremely licentious. He killed the true heir to the throne. He killed his mother. He divorced his wife and married his mistress. He later killed his mistress when she was pregnant with child. He tried to marry his adopted sister, but she refused, and was killed. He married another woman and killed her husband.

The most virtuous of citizens were put to death. As was he, eventually, by his own hands.

When fire plagued the city of Rome, Nero tried to blame the Christians, many of whom were put to death. His hatred of the Jews was manifested

in a war between them and the Romans, which eventually terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, after his death. Peter and Paul were martyred during his reign. The early Christians believed he was, and would return as, the antichrist.

When Paul spoke of the sufferings of this present time to the Roman church, this is what immediately came to their mind, for sure. But they, says Paul,

“are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

In us? Paul, did you say, “in us” ? Maybe. The translators have used a variety of prepositions here. My first inclination, when I was writing this out, was to say “to us.” Then I looked again and realized I had written the wrong word. So I changed it to “in”, then looked in the Greek. The word is *eis*. The KJV, NKJV, and NIV, wanted to go with “in.” NASB, “to.” NAB, “for.” The Amplified, which is not a translation, but a paraphrase and expansion of the Greek, didn’t want to miss anything, and put, “revealed to us and in us and for us, and conferred on us.”

They slipped on the *eis*. The basic meaning of the word is “in, or into.” It is true that God’s glory will be revealed inside of us, but it is better just to translate the Greek word here. Just as persecution comes to us, the glory of God will be revealed to us one day. No comparison. Consider what glory shall appear before our eyes, and let this be your daily joy, not what meal you are eating next. Not what TV program is coming up. Not the standings of your favorite sports team. Not the outcome of an election.

Glory. Moses, who found favor in the sight of the Lord, whom the Lord knew by name, was emboldened to ask God to show him His glory. As much as Moses was able to bear, God showed him His glory. Do you not think that we who have found favor in God’s sight, who have been called out as a people for His Name, shall also see as much of the glory of God as our new bodies can handle?

The heavens as they now are declare the glory of God. Isaiah heard angels saying that the whole earth is full of His glory. What do you think it will be like to view the new heavens and the new earth?

Psalm 24:7 declares that the very King of glory shall come in when the gates are opened to Him.

Every time we say the Lord's prayer we declare that all the glory belongs to Jesus forever. Jesus said He is coming in the glory of His Father and the holy angels. Have we stopped to consider lately just how glorious an angel is? Not worthy of worship, but men in the Bible fell down before them when they saw them. Awesome creatures. We will see them by the thousands one day.

We will see Jesus. John says that he and the other disciples saw His glory when He was here. His life. His transfiguration. His death. His resurrection. His miracles. His teachings. They saw it all. But not really. There's more to Jesus than even they saw. We will see it all. How do I know? Jesus prayed that we would, in John 17. He said that He had a glory with the Father before the world existed. We assume He stepped back into that glory when He left this inglorious planet. He prays that His followers will one day see this very glory.

The New Jerusalem is said to have the glory of God all over it. Oh the sights and sounds of the New City! Our very bodies will be reflections of the glory of God. People get all excited about the political and technological situation today and say things like, Oh what an exciting time to be alive! Friends, this is nothing. We are seeing what man can do. One day we will see with clear eyes what God has done and plans to do throughout eternity. Let's get real. Our future in Christ is *glorious* beyond words. And no matter how bad the suffering, the negative forces being brought against you will in no way compare to the positive gains that will be ours one day.

It will be revealed to us. In us. For us. Around us. Above us. Beside us.
Choose your preposition! Glory is on the way.

8:19

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for ...”

These next few verses have been twisted beyond recognition by some who try to interject their own doctrine within them. Let’s go slowly...

The words “earnest expectation” are one word in Greek, a word that means intense anticipation, the same as in English. Paul uses it another time in Philippians 1, in prison. He is expecting intensely that through the prayers of the believers he will be delivered, unashamed, and bold in his testimony.

The verb is awaits. The anticipation is waiting. It’s a strange combination of words. Other translations combined with this one and the Greek seem to say that the creation, that which God made in those first six days of our planet, is waiting eagerly, intensely, for something.

How can it be said that “things” can be expectant? How can a mountain hope for something? Do trees really get excited about the future? This is poetic language, but it doesn’t originate with Paul. The Jews of Paul’s day were, and we today are, aware of this kind of language from the prophets. Isaiah 35:1, “The wilderness and the desert shall be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom”. 55:12, “the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

I normally am dogmatically literal. Here I understand that the prophet and the apostle are speaking figuratively. It is as though all of nature has a voice, an emotion, and knows how to react when God, its Creator, does something wonderful. Why, the very heavens “declare the glory of God... day talks to day, night to night, their speech is heard all over the earth.”

(Psalm 19) Have you not ever gone walking on a fresh spring morning and felt that nature was talking to you?

Edna St Vincent Millay put it this way in her poem "God's World":

"O WORLD, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

"Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart. Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year.
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call."

Creation has a voice. Creation has a feeling. Creation is waiting for something wonderful to happen. Before we try to figure out what all of creation is waiting for, or needing desperately to happen, let's remind ourselves as to why Paul even brings this up. A definite turn in the text.

He's been talking about Christian suffering. Suffering with Him. To encourage them in the midst of the darkness of their suffering, he tells them of the flip side. Glory is coming. Things are not always going to be like they are now. Change is on the way. Darkness will be light. Sorrow will be joy. Suffering will become glory. Now a little history of how this world became so dark to begin with, and a restatement of the fact that this present darkness is not forever.

That's why this verse starts with "for". It's just picking up the theme begun in verse 17. Suffering and its end.

So what is the creation all excited about? What do the unthinking animals and plants and mountains and seas, and especially that creature of the sixth day, man, what do they all know is coming, what do they all know must follow?

"the revealing of the sons of God."

This is where confusion has been added to the text by wishful thinkers, not Biblical thinkers. I offer to you now a quick look at the way an entire movement has been spawned on the basis of this text and a few others like it. The movement, the doctrine, is called, among other things, "The Manifest Sons of God."

Then I will share with you what the text actually says.

From a website dedicated to exposing false doctrines, I quote:

In 1949 at the General Council of the Assemblies of God held in Seattle, the Council overwhelmingly approved a resolution that was prepared by a committee that dealt with the Latter Rain Movement. The resolution adopted disapproved of the following practices of the Latter Rain, and the action was made necessary as a result of the movement invading the Assembly of God churches:

- 1. The overemphasis relative to imparting, identifying, bestowing, or confirming of gifts by the laying on of hands and prophecy.*
- 2. The erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets.*
- 3. The erroneous teaching concerning the impartation of the gift of languages as special equipment for missionary service. (Interestingly this is the only tenet no longer being promoted. Why? Because it didn't work the way it was advertised.)*

4. Such other wrestlings and distortions of scripture interpretations which are in opposition to teachings and practices generally accepted among us.

The Latter Rain featured individuals with "oil in the hands"; congregational singing of "the song of the Lord" singing in the Spirit; the emphasis on "God is doing a new thing"; the manifested sons of God teaching; the placing of experience over exposition; the branding of those who denounced the movement; getting away from what the church had been.

The Latter Rain has now become almost totally mixed together with doctrines of the Manifest Sons Of God movement. Here is a quick understanding of this heresy which is also a big influence on the so-called "Third Wave":

Kingdom Theology (combined) with the Manifest Sons of God doctrine (believes in) the ongoing incarnation of God and (that) believers are "little gods" exercising autonomous sovereignty within their spheres of dominion. As this is perhaps the most objectionable and controversial aspect of Bishop Earl Paulk's teachings, it deserves special attention. Manifest Sons Of God teachings were as follows:

- A New Form and Standard for Christianity is emerging. It will change our entire understanding of what Christianity is. In 20 years it will be entirely different. Change will be so dramatic, the Christian church as we know it will oppose it. The change will come from outside the church.*
- God is to be revealed when he takes his throne in the temple. (JW's have similar teaching.)*
- Christians cannot be deceived.*
- City Churches: One church leadership per city. Other churches are to join under the apostolic authority of one man or group of men and transfer membership to them (or associated churches in other cities), and ultimately close down their churches.*
- Joel's Army/Kingdom Now/Dominion theology: the church is to conquer*

and subdue the earth in order to bring in the millennium.

- New Breed/manifest Sons of God: We will be perfected into our glorified bodies prior to Christ's return. This will allow us to subdue the earth.*
- The restoration of "the fivefold ministry" as enumerated in Ephesians 4:11, with particular emphasis on the offices of apostle and prophet.*
- Christians become "gods". We have the "divine" nature.*
- Christ comes into us as a "seed" and grows into a "prophet". Christ therefore returns "within us".*
- Jesus was sent as a "pattern" for the corporate church (Corporate church in this context means that the church becomes Christ. Christ is not complete without us because he is the head and we are the body).*
- The current churches have the spirit of "Antichrist".*

Some teachers of Manifest Sons of God:

Earl Paulk

Oral Roberts

Paul Cain

William Branham

Benny Hinn

C. Peter Wagner and all other apostles and prophets in the New Apostolic Reformation.

Paul Cain even advised his audience to wait until they get to heaven to examine his exposition of the 'Manchild Company,' which would never stand the test of Scripture: "I know some of you are going to disagree with this. Don't you even stop to disagree. Revelation 12:5. If you disagree, just file it in 'miscellaneous' and check it out. And don't bother with it; when we get to heaven we'll check it out and you'll find out I'm right.

"So my point is this, that there will be a manifestation of the sons and daughters of God. And it won't be this baloney that we've heard of in the past; I mean, there's been a few people tried to walk through a wall like this over here and knocked their brains loose, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a manifested son of God; if anyone walks through this wall over here, they're not going to tell you about it--I mean,

they're just going to do it. And sons of God don't tell you they're sons of God, they'll just show you! Amen." (Paul Cain, "The New Breed," tape.)

The Latter Rain/MSOG movement today is the New Apostolic Reformation, the counterfeit revivals, TBN televangelists. This set of doctrines has probably had the most influence on the apostate church of any other single influence.

All of that was from www.Deceptioninthechurch.com

End of quote. Thankfully. This is a totally different way of looking at Church, of salvation, of the coming of Christ, and a whole lot more. I urge you to do what I have done, namely separate yourself from all forms of this teaching, and stick your nose in the Word of God alone.

Let's continue doing that now. "The revealing of the sons of God." Who are the sons of God, and when will they be revealed?

The Scripture is loaded with clues for those who merely will look for them. One we already were very close to, in Isaiah 55. There is a series of chapters in Isaiah that is outstanding to the reader of Scripture. The great Isaiah 53 tells of the suffering Christ who will come and give His life for many. Isaiah 54 tells the barren, those who had nothing in this life before, to rejoice. They are told to expand. They are told to forget the past, for God has forgotten it. They are told that the Lord is not angry with them. The thirsty, as chapter 55 begins, are told to come and drink, just as that invitation is given in Revelation. They are told to come and seek the Lord. They are going to go out with joy. Chapter 56 continues the idea of a great time that is coming for God's people.

That theme is throughout the prophets. The people of God are going to be established in a Kingdom of power and love and peace and joy. This is all confirmed in the prophecies of the New Testament.

Old testament and New Testament prophecy are united in proclaiming this Kingdom of God and the apostles were from the beginning told to announce to the people of their day that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The King was in fact on the premises.

The actual setting up of the physical Kingdom was delayed by the rejection of Messiah, but that very rejection allowed time for the calling in of Gentiles into that same kingdom during this age that we call the church age. But the plan has not changed. One day, the people of God, the sons of God, will rule planet Earth with Jesus. The meek will inherit the earth. "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run. His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more."

That is what the creation has been and is waiting for, and we too await that glorious coming of the Lord.

8:20

"For the creation was subjected to futility..."

KJV says the creation was subject to vanity. Emptiness. Moral bankruptcy. Depravity, Strong says is one possibility. "Inutility" or uselessness. Something happened to the creation to make it worthless, empty, bankrupt, depraved, un-useful. The opposite of what the Creator had in mind.

For those with long memories, you will recall that as early as chapter one, Paul talked about this very thing, even using the same word. 1:21 tells us how mankind gradually became "vain" or un-usable, or empty, or bankrupt. Little by little the entire creation was overcome by sin and God's judgment on sin. They became fools. Suppressed the truth. Were given up by God, set free to slide down into the depths of depravity.

"not willingly..."

Nature and mankind did not bring on this curse of the planet themselves. If there is a global warming, or global cooling, depending on which decade you live in, if there is a coming disaster to the planet, it is not manufactured by man, though man is the reason for it.

No, curses come from God. The planet was fine. Perfect. Man's sin has caused God to allow His creation to reflect the evil that is in man's heart. This is not about CO2 gases or polar bears having no place to live, or too many cars and planes. This is about the evil inside man's heart and God's reaction to it from Heaven. When the judgment comes finally, it will be at the hand of Jesus Christ Himself, returning in glory to take vengeance on His enemies.

“but because of Him who subjected it in hope.”

Man didn't do this, isn't doing this. God has subjected the world to a curse, from the days of the Garden of Eden. The very ground has been cursed. Women's bodies in childbirth are cursed. And we look around, read the news, and realize that the planet is getting worse as sin accumulates among us. This trend will continue to the end. No good news for the environmentalists. Do what you will, this world retains the curse of God until men repent. And as we read in the worst curses of the book of Revelation, men will not repent but will get harder and harder. But wait. God subjected it, in hope. God subjected His planet to evil curses for thousands of years, but in hope. What could that mean?

Here again a look at more recent translations, using good Greek manuscripts, have discovered that the word “because” in verse 21 could be translated “that” (the primary meaning of *hoti*, though in certain contexts it can be “because”).

Then remember, no punctuation or verse divisions in the original Greek. Verse 21 now becomes the answer, the explanation, of what “hope” Paul

is talking about. God subjected this planet to curses and judgment, but in hope

8:21

“...[that] the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption...”

God is not saying, I think I’ll curse the planet, and I sure hope it turns out all right in the end. Bible hope is more solid than wishing, as we use it. I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow. God’s hope is an actual plan to do something. He cursed the planet, but knowing that, planning that, expecting that, one day the curse would be removed. He calls that curse here the “bondage of corruption.”

The planet and all on it are prisoners, bound to get worse and worse. No escape possible except the hope, the expectation of God, that one day this curse will be removed. And that’s when the sons of God will be revealed, not before. Charismatic preachers of the 21st century in Western Christianity are not viewed anywhere in this passage!

After the curse, what?

“into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

There are those among us today who promise liberty, while they themselves are slaves of corruption and immorality. 2 Peter 2:12ff speaks of these men. Brute beasts. Speaking evil of things they don’t understand. Given to gluttony. Covetous. Following the way of Balaam. Wells, but no water. Great swelling words that allure the weak into their fold. Promising liberty.

They tell God’s people, You need to come out of the churches you’re in now and be free. Learn how to worship freely. Set yourself free from those old teachings and practices. Be free. They believe they are fulfilling

the promises Paul is talking about here. They are far from the truth. To know Christ is to be free. To have sins taken away is to be free. To be unshackled from sin and the flesh and this present evil world, that is to be free. But even all that is not what Paul has in mind.

Paul is talking about a worldwide deliverance from the very presence of sin, at a time when God's true people will be recognized for who they are, and glorified. "Christ in you", says Paul elsewhere, is the very hope of glory. The hope that God had in mind when God subjected the world to its curses. One day a people would arise, under the Kingship of His dear Son, who would do away with that curse.

It's explained/described pretty plainly in Revelation 21. Read with me verses 1-5. A familiar, perhaps too-familiar passage that spells out exactly what Paul is referencing:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes [No tears!]; there shall be no more death [no death!]; nor sorrow [no sorrow!]; nor crying [no crying!]. There shall be no more pain [no pain!], for the former things have passed away."

Paul and John in perfect harmony. The glorious liberty of the children of God. Free from tears, death, sorrow, crying, pain. Freed from sin and corruption. Immortal incorruptible bodies. That is glorious liberty. The prayer of Moses to see God's glory; the prayer of Jesus that all that the Father gave Him will behold His glory. Everything points to that glorious day when Jesus returns.

Glorious liberty has nothing to do with how loud you can shout in church, how much sinning you can get away with, how much stuff you can acquire while you are here. God's glorious liberty will come upon God's glorious children at the coming of Jesus. Don't miss it!

8:22

"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

No mystery here, says Paul. We know. This is common knowledge now and was in Paul's day. We know there is a groaning and laboring as in childbirth. Something great is about to happen, but as in the birth of a child, there is much pain first.

In verse 19 he spoke of the earnest expectation of the creation. Creation is awaiting something. Now he adds just what that looks and feels like and it looks and feels awful. We cannot even imagine, most days, how things will be in the Kingdom days because we have lived so long with the pain of this world.

Groaning. The same word is used to describe the suffering of the children of Israel in Egypt. Stephen talks about how they groaned in agony because of what was happening around them and in them. Bondage. Cruelty. Death.

Can you hear the groaning? Paul heard it. The cruelty of the Roman government against Christians. Upheavals of nature. Depravity of immoral people. Satan's attacks on the Christians themselves. Sickness. Some of his own apostolic band brought down with illness. Paul himself shipwrecked and beaten and rejected. The groaning.

The groaning has continued unabated until our own day. The wars. Natural catastrophes. Cruelty of various governments around the world against Christians. Unimaginable poverty. Diseases. Famines. Can you

hear the groaning? Can you see a planet in labor pains? Mother earth, as she is often called, is about to give birth to a new child.

The people of the world are also aware of the groaning and the labor. They can see that things are looking bad. Some well-meaning people and some Satan-inspired people are working together to eliminate poverty by socialism. They want to save the planet by conservation methods. They want to eliminate governmental competition and war by bringing in a universal government. Universal is the watchword of the day. Universal health-care. Equal paychecks. Everything free but paid for on the backs of tax-payers.

Lots of good schemes out there. Some of them will be on their way to succeeding when antichrist will step in and take the reins. His rule will feature no Jews. No Christians. No God except himself. He will claim to be the long-awaited savior of the world who will bring it peace, and take away all the pain and suffering. He will in fact promise what Jesus has promised.

One major difference between the two, among hundreds of differences: antichrist cannot perform. He can't do what he says he can do. As all politicians, he will promise you anything to be accepted, but he will fail miserably. Things will get worse and worse until finally Jesus will have to intervene by His coming.

The final groans, the final labor pains, will be the most excruciating of all. But the child will be born. The earth will be delivered, literally and figuratively. Jesus will reign. And those who have suffered with Him will reign with Him. Now Paul speaks of something going on within us, now, as the earth experiences all these pains: And in doing so he gives us the final clue that we need to understand that the revealing of the sons of God is at the return of Jesus, not by way of the Pentecostal revival going on now. Be not deceived.

The world may look like it's getting better here and there, but read the news. Always there is pain and suffering in great amounts. Nature may try to better itself each spring, but the cycle of death continues, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggests:

"I wonder whether the phenomenon of the Spring supplies us with a part answer [to the mystery]. Nature every year, as it were, makes an effort to renew itself, to produce something permanent; it has come out of the death and the darkness of all that is so true of the Winter. In the Spring it seems to be trying to produce a perfect creation, to be going through some kind of birth-pangs year by year. But unfortunately, it does not succeed, for Spring leads only to Summer, whereas Summer leads to Autumn, and Autumn to Winter. Poor old nature tries every year to defeat the "vanity", the principle of death and decay and disintegration that is in it. But it cannot do so. It fails every time. It still goes on trying, as it feels things should be different and better; but it never succeeds. So it goes on "groaning and travailing in pain together until now." It has been doing so for a very long time... but nature still repeats the effort annually."

And not only that...

8:23

"Not only that, but we also..."

It's not just nature and the world as a whole that is caught up in the cycle of corruption and death and groaning and wishing and waiting and expecting a change. We also. Who?

"...who have the first-fruits of the Spirit."

There is a class of people spread all over this world who are very special to God. Let us say it, but let us not grow carnally proud about it. We are a very special people. What God is going to do in the new creation, in the re-made and then re-created world to come, He has begun in us. There

was a feast of first-fruits and a feast of harvest, all the fruits. The huge harvest feast is on the way. God will not only have a people, but the citizens of earth will know definitively who they are. Today they wear name-tags. Christian. Spirit-filled. Evangelical. Baptist. Bible-believers. But God does not honor our tags. He honors His Spirit. He sees His Spirit. He knows exactly which vessels are filled with His Heavenly Oil. He has a special set of eye-wear that lets Him see what others cannot see: the inside of you and me. These are the people of God that He will call forth one day to the astonishment, then the delight, of the whole world.

It begins now. We are called out. We shine as lights. But this is nothing compared to what it will be. We are largely in exile now. Many of us are in prison camps. Many work quietly behind the lines, praying desperately for those who seem to be leading our armies. But our armies are not like the armies of men. Many of them are invisible to the eyes of modern man.

But we are here. Sprinkled all over the world, calling others to join us, one by one. The numbers grow. But these men are not world-changers. They are not men of the world at all. They are the underground force of the Gospel being preached in all the world as Jesus demanded from the beginning.

Because they are persecuted, and rejected, and hidden, and hated, as Jesus promised they would be,

“even we ourselves groan within ourselves...”

The media, and most of the above-ground church, do not understand this view of Christianity. A groaning church. An imprisoned suffering church. But Paul says this is who we are. The combination of a people full of the Holy Ghost and a people bearing a cross next to Jesus upon which we are being crucified with Him. Nevertheless we live. Nevertheless it is not we. It is Christ Himself.

We have heard the world's groan. Have we heard our own? Have we heard the groan of the true church of Jesus Christ, the pain-filled church that lives from day to day trusting God for deliverance? Have we felt the groaning of anticipation for something better than these cursed bodies that bring us into pain and limitations of all sorts? Have we felt the anguish of unfulfilled desire? We want to know God better. We want to serve God better. We want to be what we were created to be, and we spend much of our lives attempting it. Then we realize at the end of life that we never attained that goal because of these bodies, and we groan for the day when we shall be able to worship and serve and live properly in brand new bodies that work.

By the way, these groanings are inside us. Not expressed outwardly. More about those groanings when we get to verse 26.

“Eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”

There it is again. “Eagerly waiting.” Takes us back to verse 19. All of creation is eagerly waiting for something. And we are waiting for something. What is creation waiting for? The revealing of the sons of God. What are we waiting for? The adoption and redemption of our body. The resurrection, that is what we are all waiting for. The coming again of Christ, when we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, just that quick! God created the entire universe in six days. Now he recreates saved mankind in seconds, showing just how quickly man can come into being, giving the lie to evolution and all its guesswork.

All the evolutionists and all their students, some of them shamefully inside the Christian church, trying to be contemporary and acceptable, the ones who taught religiously that it took millions of years for life forms to finally evolve into something human, will look at this sight, and have some groaning of their own as they see how wrong they were.

The awe will continue as these re-created sons of Adam, but now sons of God, will rise to positions of authority under Christ but over the world.

These despised followers of Jesus will become the rulers of earth for one thousand years, and the earth will be happy again. Abortion clinics will close. Murders will stop. Rape will be unknown. The curse will be lifted. Animals will get along with humans and with each other. The sons of God, that's the church, in its new bodies, will be revealed and through Christ will bring peace and joy and eternal spring. Now that will be a wonderful time to be alive. And that is what this passage is about. Not Benny Hinn, or the Kansas City Prophets, or the New Apostolic Reformation. Christ is coming! And you are coming with Him!

Notice two words are used here to describe what will happen to our bodies in that day. They are companion words. They do not mean the same thing, but they describe the exact same event. The words "to wit" or "namely" were added by translators for clarification, and are not in the original Greek. The New King James is quite satisfactory saying one word, then the comma, then the other word. Both tell of the same thing: adoption, the redemption.

Aren't we already adopted? Already redeemed? We talked about adoption earlier. Let's make it plain here again, that when the Bible says we are sons of God, it is not saying we are God. God had a Son by birth. The Spirit seed connecting with the seed of man created the God-man. There has only been one of those. We who have been born again have received that same Spirit, but the Seed of God did not connect with our flesh as it did with Jesus. Jesus is God in human flesh. We are spirit beings who must keep denying our flesh. Jesus had no sin. We fight against sin daily. But God has adopted us into the family, and one day we will receive a body like His, but we will not become then, nor have we become now, gods. There is and always will be one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ant it ain't me, and it ain't you.

But if we are adopted now, why are we waiting for our adoption so eagerly? Is there some doubt about whether we will make it? Will the adoption contract be rescinded if we mess up? No, when God says he is going to do something, He follows through. When God starts something,

He finishes it. The contract is real. For by grace you have been saved, you were saved. But one day that which is on paper and real will turn into entrance into your inheritance. When the time is right for you, you will enter into the actualization of what is now on paper, that is, a promise of the Word of God. In God's eyes, you are an adopted child now, but in your own eyes, in your own full experience, it comes later.

That's why we eagerly await it. We get little inklings now of the glory that is coming, and our spirit cries out, More, More! And the more is coming. Your spirit is adopted now. You believe it. You know it. You feel it. One day you will see it, in a brand new body that can fully enjoy it.

And your redemption. The redemption of your body, he is talking about here. As with adoption, you know that you have been redeemed already. That means, bought with a price. The price was paid in full and you accepted what Jesus did for you. He redeemed you at Calvary. He redeemed you at your new birth, when you accepted His redemption. But wait, there's more: your very body is going to be redeemed. God will say, Brother _____, give me that old body of yours, and I'll give you a new one in its place. Yes, that's the price of a new body. You must turn in the old body. But what an exchange. All of that was paid for in full at Calvary, but these vile bodies have to be turned in first.

Charles Spurgeon echoes Paul and quotes from him in another epistle, bringing this truth home:

Ephesians speaks of "That holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."—Eph. 1. 13, 14.

In a very true and real sense the things promised in the covenant are already the property of believers. " All things are yours." The great Father might truly say to each one of the sons who abide in his house, "All that I have is thine." The inheritance is already ours, say the old divines, ... in the promise of God, in the price paid by the Lord Jesus, and in its first principles which are infused into us by the Holy Spirit. In his sure promise

the Father has already "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ": he has not only resolved to enrich us in the future, but even now he has endowed us with the treasures of his love. The Lord Jesus has not merely made us heirs of an infinite estate in the ages to come, but he has brought us into immediate enjoyment of a present portion ; as saith the Scripture, " In whom also we have obtained an inheritance."

The creation is expectantly hoping for the people of God to be revealed. The people of God are expectantly waiting for our new bodies to be revealed. When that happens, glory will return to the planet, as King Jesus rules with us, over all. Then will be fulfilled what the church has prayed every day since its beginning, "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Keep praying that prayer. It will be answered. That is the hope that the next verse talks about:

8:24

"For we were saved in this hope..."

Notice the tense of things. We were saved. Past. But we are still hoping for something. That's future. Our salvation is not complete, in this context, until we get our new bodies. Verse 19 says there is still something huge the creation is waiting for. Verse 23 tells us there is something huge we are waiting for. That idea of waiting expectantly, confidently, for something, is the very definition of hope. The NKJV has added the word "this" to bring us to look at the context. We were saved by this hope. The context is all about hoping for something coming. This is the very hope by which, in which, we were saved.

Think back to the time when you were saved. You heard about your sin. You saw the corruption in your flesh. But someone told you there is a Heaven to gain. Someone told you your sins can be forgiven. That flesh can be overcome. That Jesus is going to come back for you one day, change your body, let you live with Him forever. Our salvation is built around hope. Promises. When you have nothing, and someone, God

Himself, promises you everything, if you're smart, you grab for it. You are given hope that maybe life does not have to be like you have experienced it. You can have victory now and something to look forward to later.

That looking forward is what this passage is about, and it is directed, remember, to those who are suffering with Jesus. What a comfort this is to them. What a joy to know that what I am enduring now I will not be enduring forever. Jesus will come. Things will change. Life will be beautiful and deep in my heart it is beautiful even now, and that new life in me is what gives me assurance that even better life is coming. No, your best life is not now. Your best life is built around the hope of His coming, and the revealing of the sons of God on this planet. The Kingdom is coming. Hope!

"...for hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?"

All these hopes will die when Jesus comes. Now He will undoubtedly tell us of things beyond the Millennium for which we can hope. But that is not where we are now. We have a hope of His coming Kingdom, and when that Kingdom appears, is seen, hope doesn't exist any longer. Hope, like faith, will become sight and evaporate.

We might want to add here the difference between hope and faith. They are truly related. Hebrews tell us that faith is the substance of the things you are hoping for. God gives a promise. Makes a statement. Something inside says, this is true. I will base my life on this thing. This thing itself is the hope. But faith is the power that gives you grace to base your life on. Faith is the assurance that your hope is real. Faith holds up your hope. Your hope may grow weak as you look around you and see the world falling apart. Faith comes along and says, Don't give up. Hang on to that hope.

Peter sees Jesus walking on water. He had never seen Jesus or anyone walking on water before. It occurred to him that if Jesus could do it, he could do it. With Jesus' assistance, of course. If it was Jesus' will, Jesus

would make it happen. Hope was inside him. Faith said, Get out of the boat. Your hope is real. You have the right idea. Go for it. Faith was the “assurance”, as some Bible translators have it, the assurance of the thing he hoped for.

Then his faith failed. He fed his faith with the sight of the waves and did not allow his faith to be centered on the hope that got him moving to begin with.

Hope comes first. The holding on to a promise deep inside of you. Faith makes you act on that hope you have. Fine line of difference, but a real one. Some people are great with faith, but their hope is not based in truth, so they don't get what they think they are supposed to get, though they have more faith than you do. They are just believing people. We call that gullibility.

Others have a hope in God's truths that is very real but they have trouble applying what they know in real life situations. Hope, but little faith. The spiritually mature are those who accept every word of God as pure and holy and are ordering their lives according to those words.

8:25

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

Do you see the pattern now? Verse 19, the whole creation eagerly waits for the sons of God to be revealed. Verse 23, we eagerly wait for these bodies to be changed in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. In that moment the world understands the mystery, namely that God's people are the sons of God who are to rule the planet and make it right, under King Jesus. And here, we eagerly wait – same word – for something we do not see now.

Do you see how ludicrous then is the position of the present wave of charismatics, that some group of preachers and church members in this age are becoming the manifested sons of God? I see them now. In fact, we can see through them now. They are not something we do not see, they are someone we see, and wish we didn't, for they wreak havoc in the church of Jesus.

Paul adds here that we eagerly await with perseverance. KJV is patience. Paul said *hupomonay*, endurance. Patience has to do with bearing trials calmly and without complaining. It's almost a passive idea. It captures some of the sense of *hupomonay*. It's the picture of a wife whose husband is in the military, on the field of battle. She is patiently going about her business, trusting that all will be well with her love.

Perseverance has to do with continuing on in spite of difficulties. Enduring, as some translators have it, is to undergo hardship without giving in. To suffer. Both of these are more like the picture of a marathon runner or one who is climbing Mt. Everest. Exhaustion. Hurdles. Dangers. But continuing on anyway.

Perseverance and endurance are very close and say what Paul is trying to say here. We are waiting eagerly, but we are not just sitting in place, we are moving ahead in the race, enduring everything the enemy throws at us on the way. We know good things are coming so we keep plowing on.

8:26

"Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses,"

"As thus", in the same way. He's comparing now, what he has just said, to something in our present life. What is the comparison? I believe it goes back to verse 23. That verse talks about our groaning. Our sighing because of our present weaknesses and difficulties. My spirit is heavy and burdened down. It is not a sin to sigh and groan. It becomes sinful when we don't groan to the Lord enough and we keep burdening others with

our troubles. Then it becomes self, and unawareness of other people's problems. Yes, bear one another's burdens, but don't use people as a crutch when Jesus has broad shoulders. Tell Him about it, but even then, just the facts. Not your interpretation. "Oh God, I'm suffering because I am so righteous." "Oh God, they treat me unjustly. It's not fair." Just tell Him you're hurting, and you need help.

Paul says, in the same way that you groan to God, the Spirit also helps us when we are weak. He sees our groanings. He hears. And he joins in. We never go to the Father alone.

"... for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought..."

We think we do. "Lord I need a new car." Maybe. But maybe just a good mechanic. "Lord, the Devil keeps making me angry." Probably not. Your flesh needs some attention. You need the self-control of the Spirit. "Lord, take away this persecution." But if He does, how can He fulfill His promise to you that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution? "Lord, give me love." God may say, I've given it to you. It's in that package marked "Fruit of the Spirit." Do you have the Spirit? Have you unwrapped the package? Do you wait on Me and listen to Me and open your eyes to the possibilities around you to love? You have love already.

So often, we do not know how to pray. We pray and we don't receive, because we're praying selfishly and without the Kingdom of God in our sights. But though we do not know how to pray, the Spirit does.

"... but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us..."

What a wonderful thought. In my ignorance I pray amiss. But the indwelling Spirit bypasses my silliness and goes to the Father on my behalf. He knows how to pray. He gets answers. The right answers. Because, the right prayers. Notice the method of the Spirit...

"... with groanings which cannot be uttered."

I have an announcement to make. This text is not about speaking in tongues. It's about suffering, groaning, together with the Spirit. We may not even be aware of what He is doing. Or we may. We may feel something going on in our spirit. We will see the results later. But the key here is, they cannot be uttered. Tongues and prophecy and such have been known as the gifts of "utterance." Speaking out loud for the edification of the church.

We will not enter into the discussion now as to whether those gifts are here or not here in our day. The point I make here is that Romans 8:26 is not about that, and in a wrong interpretation of a verse, we miss the beauty of the right interpretation.

The theme of "groaning" goes back to verse 22. The creation is groaning. Then verse 23, we are groaning. Now verse 26, we find that God Himself is groaning inside of us.

The word is *stenadzo*. It comes from a word that means narrow. Strait without the "gh." Ships that have to go through a strait sometimes find it difficult to navigate. We have narrow places in our lives. The earth is going through "dire straits" in our day. Narrow difficult places that create groans within us. We see Jesus groaning within Himself in John 11, dealing with the Lazarus situation. Nothing audible here. He sees Mary and Martha distressed. He sees the Jews coming around, crying. The groan finally came out later as tears.

Why was Jesus so moved? Because this Lazarus was among His true friends? But as the sisters pointed out, He could have come earlier and healed Lazarus. Was he dealing with the fact that this miracle would be the last straw in the case that the Pharisees had against Him? Did He suddenly realize that Lazarus' resurrection would mean His own death? Was He conflicted with this idea of using His miracle power in some way that might be taken wrongly? Did His mind go back to His first miracle at

Cana, and His hesitation to allow Mary to use Him for some family interest? Jesus was conflicted, and the groaning began.

Was this groaning what Paul is talking about here? Jesus was in a narrow place and the Spirit of God in Him reaching out to the Father with an S.O.S.? Father, the pain. Father, wisdom. Father, help Me.

I think that is what the groaning is about inside of us. Oh, we groan in our own spirit. And the Holy Spirit comes alongside our spirit and says, "Let Me help. I'll go through this narrow passage with you, and we will come safely soon into the ocean of God's power and promises."

These groanings, which may have started with your own issues, soon become the Father's. They are deep inside of you, and they go directly to God without any man knowing what is going on. But the results are real and wonderful if you will wait on them.

8:27

"Now, He Who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is..."

Follow the flow. Lots of groaning going on. You are groaning inside. Help, Lord. The Holy Ghost groans with you. Help him, Lord. Waves of communication ascending, not from your mouth, but from your spirit, and then they reach Heaven. The Father is listening. His scanner is always searching back and forth on the people of God, waiting to help someone in need. And He picks up the signal, the "S.O.S". The Father knows the mind of the Spirit. It's essentially the same mind. And we have the mind of Christ too, says Paul elsewhere. The Trinity, the only power in Heaven and earth, is on this case.

"...because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God..."

Some would enter the discussion of predestination and election in verse 29. But it begins here. Paul enters now into a teaching that is so far beyond us that the greats in the Bible world have tried unsuccessfully for centuries to figure it out. Take a deep breath. This letter was written to believers just like you and me, whether we be Jews or Gentiles. God has a plan. He is working out that plan. Your plans may or may not work out. His will. Listen carefully here.

Before we go to that subject, we need to see something about intercession that makes this passage even more remarkable. Who is the Intercessor? In just a few verses, and elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus is said to be the one Who intercedes. He ascends into heaven, sits at the Father's right hand, and listens to our prayers and passes them on to the Father.

But in verse 26 we just learned that it is the Spirit who intercedes. You see again the Oneness side of the Trinity. Three in One. One God, three manifestations, persons, working in perfect harmony and unity. The Spirit is poured out from Jesus, as he promised He would do, and enters the hearts of individual believers, as well as entire church bodies.

From that vantage point the Spirit picks up signals from the believer, passes them on to the Son, who whispers them to the Father, all in one split second. The Father makes a judgment, nudges the Son to proceed with the answer, and immediately the Spirit knows what is going on and brings a word to your heart.

But it is the "will of God" part of this passage we need to look at. All of these prayer arrows are shot out from Heaven when they have been cleared by the One Who has made the plan for all time. If your prayer does not match the perfect will of God that He made at the foundation of the world, and before that foundation, your prayer is kicked back with a message, "Revise."

“Lord, I want this and I want it now!” Message, even with much groaning, comes eventually to the Father. The Father reads the message and says, “No.” Timing is off. Tell her to revise it and try again. In humility we all finally say after many returned messages, “Lord, your will be done. Show me how to pray in your will, so that my prayers will be heard and answered positively.”

Jesus gave us a model prayer that, when prayed meaningfully, not as a robot, always gets answered. It’s his will for His Name to be praised. It’s His will for His Kingdom to come. It’s His will that what He wants will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. It’s His will to give you every day your daily bread. It’s His will to forgive you as you forgive others. And when we pray in His will, we get answered.

Those other things we pray for may need to be tweaked a little. Maybe it’s a matter of timing. Maybe it’s a matter of selfish praying. Maybe God is not glorified in the thing you want so badly. Maybe the justice you are after cannot come until you are more just and fair yourself. Lots of maybes when we don’t pray according to the will of God.

Then everyone’s favorite verse (28) can be read. And that verse officially introduces the deeper things about the plan of God, that Paul only hinted at here. He goes even deeper in chapters 9-11. This teaching about the unchanging plan of God is not going away!

8:28

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,

This verse will stand alone, it is true. But it is much richer and deeper when left in its context. What is its context? “The sufferings of this present time,” back in verse 18. We’re going through it, says Paul. But great days are coming. You can feel it in the creation, as it groans for the new creation. You can feel it in your body, as you groan for a new body.

You can sense it by faith in your spirit, as the Holy Spirit comes along and intercedes for you.

All these things that seem to be working against us now, are really working together for our good. The same truth is repeated in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17: "We do not lose heart. Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

Now, that insight will not be gained by treating this verse as a ticket to earthly gain. Well, the boss tried to fire me, but he was exposed, and it led to my promotion. All things work together for good.

In fact, looked at in an earthly sense, this verse will not work. All things don't work together for "good" in our earthly life. Sometimes that boss does fire you, maybe because of your faith, and you lose income. Sometimes you are thrown to the lions and they eat you for breakfast. Sometimes the office you are working in happens to be in a building that Muslims want to bring to the ground by flying through it.

The context of this idea is eternity. The coming again of Jesus. The new creation. The new bodies. Don't expect every little detail of your life here to be sweet and happy. But know this. No matter what the losses. No matter what the suffering. No matter what the pain. There's a better day a -comin'. This used to be our hope. This was what we lived for. But when the false teachers came in and told us that this was our best life, that prosperity is the aim, we turned away from heavenly things, turned to earthly things, then when that failed, many turned away from God altogether.

All the nasty awful things that can happen to a God-lover in this life do indeed work together for our eternal good. Don't forget the God-lover part. Not just all things work together, but all things work for those who love God. Remember that some things work together for good in this life

for those who do not love God. But, speaking of the next life, all things work together for good for you if you love the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

And don't forget those first three words. And we know. This is not an opinion we hold. This is certain knowledge. Do you love God? It is all going to work out in your favor, and after Jesus comes, glory.

Then a little more about those who love God,

“...to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

The Holy Spirit is making intercession for saints, we learned, according to the will of God. God has a will. A plan. It is unchanging. Your prayers are given to enhance His will, not yours. Let His plan work. Be a part of His plan. If you are in Christ, you are called. Here is clue two regarding the unchanging will of God. God-lovers are a called people. You could not love God if God had not first loved you and called you. You did not hear an audible voice, but something inside said, Come to Jesus. You heard that. You responded to that. Over the years you have grown in that call and in that love.

That means there is a purpose in your life. It is His purpose. There is a plan God is working out and you are a part of that plan. Keep seeking God about what your part is. Remember you are part of a huge interacting puzzle that all fits together in Him. Young and immature believers have this thinking that God and all the people of God are striving to work out *my* plan. We invite God to bless our plans. We invite God to be our co-pilot. That's children's talk. Grownups realize it is God's plan, and they must strive to find how their lives fit into it.

What is His overall purpose? What is your purpose inside His purpose?

Now Paul stops to begin to explain the “can of worms” he has just opened by talking about the “will of God,” a “called” people, a “purpose” written

into the universe. Let's take it another level. Another time for a deep breath, for the next verses have divided the Christian church.

8:29

"For whom He foreknew..."

There is an unbroken chain of events that goes from God's foreknowledge of saints to God's glorifying those saints. The links in the chain we will take one by one. But this, I think we can all agree on: there is a family portrait displayed in heaven. God has had that picture before Him from the foundation of the world. A class photo, if you will. Everyone that is going to be saved and in heaven, God saw from the foundation of the world. No matter which side of the debate you are on, this is clear. What God saw is going to come to pass.

It's the links that throw some people. We'll talk about the links later, but first there is a serious item for discussion here in verse 28 that we don't want to skip over in our rush to prove the doctrine of election.

"...He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..."

Still no ironclad proof here that the doctrines Calvin taught, and that the Bible seems to teach elsewhere, are correct. All we know so far is that God saw a people, and decided that they would be conformed to Jesus. They would be like Jesus. God is going to make all of His children look like Jesus. That's no more than 1 John 3:2, "... we know that when Jesus is revealed, we shall be like Him." We're getting new bodies. Our spirits will have been sanctified, perfected. Jesus told us, "You will be holy, for I am holy." That's a promise. In ways that only He knows, He will make us holy.

And that was in the plan of God. That was the destiny of each child of God, written in advance. If you think you have a destiny to be something great in this life, you may be mistaken. Those who are telling you to follow

your dreams, follow your gut, make something of your life, may be leading you away from God's destiny for His own.

Here is God's destiny, written on paper so you can't ignore it. Take a hard look. Love it. Devour it. This is God's will for your life. This is God's plan for your life: to be like Jesus.

Disappointed? You wanted to be a rock star. You wanted to be a famous athlete. You wanted to make so much money. You wanted to be beautiful and accepted. That's not God's plan for your life. God's plan is that you be like Jesus. That you take up a cross. That you die on that cross. That your life be given to God and man, as was Jesus' life. Paul even tells us why:

"... that He might be the firstborn among many brethren..."

You see, it's not all about you and me after all. It's all about Him. The firstborn child is the child of privilege. He is the preeminent one. He was conceived of and born of the Holy Ghost. God's firstborn. God's only Son of that sort. But you too were born of the Holy Spirit when you were born again. You now have a common Father with Jesus. That makes Him your brother.

Jesus didn't refer to the followers as brothers when He was here, until the very end, after His resurrection. He called them disciples. Then friends. But after the resurrection, Pentecost is in view. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Himself, would fill these men and unite them to Him forever.

That was all in the plan of God. He saw a family, before the worlds were formed. He would be the Father. Jesus would be the Son. Then look at the picture very closely, and you just might see yourself and millions of others gathered around Jesus, His brothers and sisters. Look again. You may need a magnifying glass. But they all, even though different from each other, they all have an amazing likeness to their Father, and to their Big Brother Jesus. Same radiance. Same holy look. Same joy. Look, they are all happy. No tears.

God sees this picture every day. He knows who will be there, and who will not. And that picture does not change every day. He doesn't photo-shop you out of the picture when you have a bad day. Then put you in the next day when you start acting right again. The picture is developed and final and cannot be changed, by the very decree of God Almighty. What He sees he will have. He who began the good work will finish it. He who took the picture will develop it and frame it and hang it in the halls of the throne room. Settled!

Verse 30 is the proof of that. Remember, verse 29 alone proves only that He knew, and knows, and created a plan for all His kids to look like Jesus. Stand by for verse 30. Are you ready for this?

8:30

"Moreover whom He predestined..."

Before we launch the study of election, free-will, predestination, a little history is on order. Very little. I wish we could wipe the slate clean, and simply open the Book, see what it says, and pretend that hundreds of books and tapes and videos have not been written on this subject. I wish we were trained in just believing everything God says, word for word, and trusting Him to make sense of it when we cannot. I wish that we were not of those who will be described in the next chapter as people who "reply against God."

But such is not the case. We use our own brain often to challenge clearly written statements from apostles and prophets. Risen from the dead? How is that possible? Must mean something else. One God but Three persons? How does that work? Must mean something else. Whosoever will, but chosen of God before the foundation of the world? How reconcile that with human logic?

The day that we realize that human logic is not the standard adhered to in Heaven, will be a happy day for our faith life and the church.

I think it is fair to suggest that the doctrine of election/predestination has been the standard through the centuries. I believe Paul taught it. I believe Augustine taught it. And to this day, even Romanism itself acknowledges it, though in a watered-down form:

From a Catholic site called Aleteia, I quote:

In fact, predestination is a Catholic idea, and a Catholic word. I'm all about the project of reclaiming what is ours.

Scripture expresses very clearly the idea that those who are saved are "predestined" (Romans 8:28), that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), that those who are the heirs of Christ "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Thus it is a dogma of the faith that "God, by an eternal resolve of His Will, has predestined certain men to eternal blessedness."

We know that we are saved only by the gift of God's grace. We know that God knows from all time who will be saved and who will not. So, what does this mean? That God only gives His grace to some people and not to others? That He simply chooses at random who will be saved? To put it most bluntly: If God predestines some people for Heaven, does that not imply that He also predestines some people to Hell?

On this the Church is firm: "God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end" (CCC 1037). This is a relief to hear!

Well, not much of a relief when we realize that all men continue in sin all the time, and that God Himself never came up with the idea of mortal vs venial sin. That is a Catholic invention that is a convenient and comforting truth in arguments such as these.

Paul (and other Bible writers), Augustine, Rome, and the major reformers. Luther. Calvin. All believed in some form of election.

But there were challenges, serious ones, to the standard teaching of the church, as there have always been challenges to difficult teachings. The resurrection has been challenged in every generation. The Trinity was challenged. And election was challenged.

One of its main challengers was one Jacob Arminius:

Wikipedia states: [Arminius] was a Dutch theologian from the Protestant Reformation period whose views became the basis of Arminianism.... He served from 1603 as professor in theology at the University of Leiden and wrote many books and treatises on theology. Following his death, his challenge to the Reformed standard, the Belgic Confession, provoked ample discussion at the Synod of Dort, which crafted the five points of Calvinism in response to Arminius's teaching.

So the five-point Calvinism you hear so much about came *after Calvin* in response to Arminius. The Arminian “common sense” approach to the Bible and the apostles caught on, and in short has become the majority opinion when it comes to election in our day. Arminius makes a lot of good points. But let it be understood again that it is a challenge to the main stream, historically, of Christian thought. There are several other teachings popular among us today that do not derive from the apostles but show up in the last few centuries, challenges to the Scripture and the main stream.

May we be very careful to follow every word of the text, and believe every word of it, not because it is “a relief to hear” but because it is true. We don’t bring our own bucket load of ideas to dump into the flow of God’s revelation. We go with empty buckets and dip from that flow a pure belief system.

And that system is not Calvinism. It is not Arminianism. Those terms were unknown in early centuries. It is Truth. Not your truth, not their truth, not mine. What saith the Lord?

With that we enter in to the first verse in the text that is clearly needing Divine grace to comprehend and believe. We can temporarily concede that no proof can be taken from verse 29 as to election. Verse 30 is something else, and makes us take another look at verse 29.

“Whom He predestined...”

That was “whom.” Not “what.” The reason I left verse 29 out of the argument is that some are of the opinion that God predestined a plan, but not individual people. Those that he foreknew, he decided that they should become conformed etc. The emphasis to them is on what he did not to whom He did it.

Verse 30 starts out with the opposite of that idea. Paul has a chain link fence in mind. One link is connected to the one before it. They cannot be separated. God saw into the future. He saw individuals. Those individuals that He saw, He predestined. Those whom he predestined, he called. Don't break the links of the chain.

Are we missing anything? Are we defining words improperly? “Foreknew”. That's pretty clear. “Predestined”? In the Greek, to “limit in advance.” To predetermine. Translated also “ordain”.

The word is used again by Paul in Ephesians 1, in the same context. There's no escaping it. Some people he knew beforehand, God limited their destiny in advance. He predetermined their destiny in advance. And that same group,

“...he called.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 helps us understand this. "... God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved..." First century Christians were the first to be a part of this New Covenant people of God. The church at Thessalonica was one of the first churches to hear God's call, God's choosing call. "To this He called you by our Gospel..."

They were among the predestined to hear the call of God to salvation. They heard it when they heard the Gospel preached by Paul. That's how you are called. The Word is preached, and something goes off in your heart.

But wait. The Bible says, many are called, but few are chosen. How do we know the difference between the called chosen and the called un-chosen? Easy. The called chosen answer the phone. "Hello? This is Bob. I'm interested. I want this. I accept this invitation."

Proof positive that you are in. You want to be in. Many hear the call every day all over the world. But they have not been predestined to salvation. They are not interested. They were not seen of God before the foundation of the world.

Of course, one rejection of the call may not be the end. People can be called multiple times before they pick up the receiver (as we used to call it.) The point is, only those who accept the call are part of that chosen band. God has dealt with their heart, they want to know and follow this Christ.

So there's this group of people God saw. He predetermined that this group, and no others, would come to him. And all others will be damned by God? No, they were already damned. They all had turned their back on God from birth. They have lived willfully in their sins and they love it so. They have damned themselves. Justice will be served in their lives.

Justice will not be served in the life of the believer. We who are being saved are not products of justice. Justice was killing us. We are products

of grace. For us, justice was meted out at Calvary. We go into Heaven as special favorites of God, by the merit of Jesus, not our own merit.

As the Catholic website said, it is not proper to say that God predetermined that all non-Christians be damned. Here is where free will kicks in. They willed their own damnation all their lives by sinning against God. But God decided not to allow all of them to be lost. That's when He called out of that lost humanity a few souls, precious to Him for His own reasons, and brought them to Himself.

Called. Called out. The very word "church" is a derivative of the Greek word for "called." *Kaleo*, in its participle form is *ekklesia*, translated "church". It means simply, "the called out ones." That's who we are. How grateful we ought to be.

You will forever be asking, as David did, "Why me? Who am I?" There is no humanly acceptable answer to that question. We throw it in there with the questions, "How big is God?" and "How could God create the world out of nothing?" and "Why is there air?" Don't worry about it. But let's make it our chief joy. God chose us out of this present evil world to be a peculiar and precious people to Himself.

Next link:

"whom He called, these He also justified."

There is a group of people that God knew a long time ago. He knew them. He saw them. He loved them. He made a plan for them. The plan was that they would be conformed to the very image of Jesus. That, together with Jesus, they would form His family. Then, one by one, He called them out of the world. One here, a few over here, gradually, gradually, the numbers grow through the years. Some are with Him already, some will be joining today, some tomorrow. The family grows and grows, but never past the number He saw and planned for before the world began.

As these people were called out, were they just separated from the world and left to fend for themselves? No, He justified them. In fact it was their justification that separated them. There are people in the world who separate but who have no reason to separate except that they don't like the world, or that they want attention. God's people receive God's righteousness on them. God's forgiveness, God's very life. That is what separates them as they are called out of the world's system.

Many people know they are called out but haven't yet experienced why. Then Jesus saves them. Being called is not the end of the journey. Jesus said you must be born again. The calling is the hearing of the Gospel, but the being justified is the receiving of forgiveness. It's all in the same package, and there is more. For,

“and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Paul speaks in the past tense here. For you and me it is still future. We will be glorified with brand new glorious bodies when He comes. But some are in the glory of Heaven already. They still await their bodies, but it is impossible to be with the Lord without being in some way glorified by His Presence.

Putting these two words together is a great comfort. Do you see that the people who are justified are the same ones as the ones who are glorified? Does that not help your assurance? If you are truly a forgiven saint of God, glory is awaiting you. Period. Not if this or if that. God began the work in you by calling you to salvation, taking away your old sinful life, and He will finish that work.

There is a people God saw and knew. For them He created a plan. To work out that plan, he called them out of the world, saved them by His blood, gave them His Spirit, and He will take that same group, and only that group, on to glory. In fact, a good number of them have already gone on. I see no mystery in these verses. No reason to argue. Only reason to

rejoice. Only reason to wonder, Why me, Lord? But not to let that question exclude me. Not to say, I'm not worthy, it can't be me.

Yes, it's you. If you love Jesus Christ and He is in you, you have been called, justified, and will soon be glorified. Paul anticipates our doubts and wonder and excitement, and asks,

8:31

“What then shall we say to these things?”

I mean, this is too wonderful! How can we respond to such a salvation! We just won the Heavenly Lottery. We did nothing to deserve it. We did everything not to deserve it. But here it is. Grace, pure and simple. Grace, unimaginable.

I mean, we know what others say. Too good to be true. You can't be sure. Believing that you are elected is presumptuous if not a fruit of pride. There's got to be something that we do to get to Heaven, not just that God does. How do we know what God was thinking before the world began? And so on and on.

But what shall we say? What is our response? Men and women of the jury, what is your verdict now? We can say Paul is asking only about the last few verses. But could it be that this section of Romans is a climactic moment in the writing? A time when he looks back to everything he has said so far?

Men are guilty because the law says so. But men can be innocent because Jesus died to pay the price of breaking the law. Jesus, the second Adam, the seed of Abraham, has won our salvation, the one he saw from the foundation of the world. To that end He called us and saved us and will bring us to glory, debt-free. What shall we say to all of this?

In response Paul asks a series of five more questions. See him in the courtroom drilling the jury, asking them to think seriously about the answer they are going to give. What will you say? What is your response? Question 1 as he summarizes and concludes his argument:

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

And God in Christ has erased the “if” part of that question. Christ lives in you. Christ died for you. God *is* for you! And no one can be against you!

Don’t misunderstand the question. Paul is not saying we do not have enemies. Satan and all his demons hate you thoroughly. You are standing in the way of his total domination of this planet. You must be removed. But he can’t come against you in any meaningful way. The worst he can do is send you into the eternal arms of the One he hates even more than he hates you! And he can’t even do that without permission.

You have other enemies. All who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ are your enemies. Any enemy of Heaven is your enemy. Read Psalms. It won’t be long before you will come across a pure hatred of the enemies of God. David and the others knew which side they were on. Do we? Jesus has commanded that we love our enemies. But remember that no matter how much we love them and care for them and do for them, they will never be our friends until they come to Christ and their eyes are opened to the truths that have captured us.

But though they are enemies, they too are bound from hurting us in any long-term way. We always have the victory in clashes with them, one way or another.

You are an enemy of you, also. But He who began that good work in you, that sanctifying work, that cleansing and changing work... He will finish it. You will not come against yourself permanently either.

Who is there? No one. The answer to his first question is no one. Jesus asks the woman taken in adultery, Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? No one, Lord. No one. That brings us to question 2:

8:32

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

We need to learn to read the fine print when drinking in Holy Scripture. Every word means something. Look at the word “us” here. Jesus was delivered for “us.” I will not argue here about a limited atonement, but I see where the Reformers got it. This is not the only Scripture that suggests such a thing. Even everyone’s favorite, John 3:16, tells us that God’s Son was given for “whosoever believes in Him.” Not for everyone. Not universal. When Jesus prayed in John 17, He prayed not for the world, but for those whom the Father had given Him. Something to think about as you contemplate the insertion of the little word “us” here.

Do you see the rest of His argument? God has already given His best when He gave Jesus to die. He’s already given His best when He, through the Holy Spirit, descended on Pentecost and filled the church with His glory and Presence and very words. In the light of such gifts He has already given, do you think He won’t give you the daily bread you pray for, and that multitude of other blessings you need from time to time in this life?

But is that “all things” referring to the daily necessities of life anyway? In the context of this discussion, Paul is saying that everything He has been talking about, the justification, the glorification, the workings of the Spirit in us, are a given in the light of the greater gifts He has already provided. No one and no set of circumstances can be against God providing everything you could possibly need in this life and the next.

Next question, says the lawyer. But wait. We left out another item.

He says, “with Him.” He, Jesus, is going to give these things with Him, with the Father. What does that tell you, if you ever had any doubt about it? It says “I and My Father are One.” Father and Son work in tandem. As the Father is freely giving you all things, so is the Son. Jesus is and always has been, God. You can’t be blessed by God the Father without being blessed by God the Son. Now, next question. Question 3 is in verse 33:

8:33

“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?”

Here is a word that some do not like to use. But here it is. Elect. Chosen. Decreed with an eternal decree to be sons of God. Many may be called. But a few are elect.

Paul started this current discussion, which is really a summary of the bigger discussion of Romans, by saying there is no condemnation. He ends it the same way. No one can stand in the courtroom and say, I have an indictment against this man. I have a grievance to file against this man. This man is guilty. No one can do that now. Not against the man who is in Christ Jesus, which by definition means a man who walks according to the Spirit.

“It is God who justifies.”

Those whom He called out by His sovereign grace, He justifies. He makes them right before the Law, even the law of God. Not guilty. By order of heaven. What puny man or devil can stand in the face of God and say, You’re wrong. He’s not justified. He’s still in his sins. He’s still going to hell. He’s condemned forever. No man. No devil. God has spoken. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

8:34

“Who is he who condemns?”

Again referring to 8:1. No condemnation. Question 4.

“It is Christ who died...”

Jesus took the condemnation on Himself. We shall never fathom what it was like for God, in the flesh, to bear the wrath of a God who was seriously angry with the accumulated sins of mankind. God destroyed a whole world at one time, minus eight people. God brought judgment on Israel, His own chosen nation, then on the nations that punished Israel. God judges sin.

But in Christ, judgment was on the sins of all those who would ever come to faith in Him, at the very least. Some say the sins of all men everywhere in all generations of mankind.

Of course, the question then comes, if Christ paid the price for all men everywhere, then how can He judge man in the end? The price for their sin is paid. They must go to Heaven, regardless. Or He is unjust to make them pay a second time for that which is already paid in full?

The Romanists have historically had this mentality in regards to their indulgences. The message went out that you could pay for a slip of paper signed by the Pope, that would give you the right to sin. Your payment covered the sin.

Is that what happened at Calvary? Jesus' payment covered all sins everywhere, so man doesn't have to pay again? Or is it as this text demands, there is no condemnation to them who walk after the Spirit. Those who are His by faith. The called. The justified. The glorified. The elect.

“and furthermore also is risen...”

We rest not only on the death of Jesus but on the fact that He has power over death. We glory not only in His suffering, but rejoice that we have absolute proof that the price was paid, by seeing Jesus alive and well. Earlier Paul had said that Jesus was raised up for our justification (4:25). Which reiterates the theme of God being the one who justifies His called and chosen people.

“who is even at the right hand of God...”

Do you see what Paul is doing? He’s building the case that no one can be against us. No one can accuse us again. Jesus died. Jesus rose, he is all-powerful. He sits at the very right hand of God in authority. “All authority has been granted to Me in heaven and earth!” Who dares to speak against a decree of such a one? Not only that, since He has the ear of the Father,

“[He] also makes intercession for us.”

Case closed. You’re going to step into the throne room while the Son is talking to the Father on my behalf? You’re going to hurl your insults and malice against me while that conversation is going on? Don’t count on it!

8:35

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

He starts question five with “who” but he answers it with a series of “what’s”, letting us assume that it is a “who” that is behind all the things that come against us. Ultimately, it is not any of these things themselves that attack, but these are the weapons in the arsenal of him who hates us so. Nevertheless, even with all the hatred, separation from Christ is impossible. Of course, those who must have a salvation that can be lost, will tell us that we can separate ourselves, even though Satan cannot separate us.

These are the same people who believe that we can save ourselves, perhaps. They seem to take delight in their own authority. They believed. They were baptized. They did good works. Some days. But then they did bad works, and lost it. Hmmm. What if they do good works again? In and out of the Kingdom?

It is true that the Greek behind “who” can also mean “what”, as the New American Bible translated it. But that would be inconsistent with the rest of this passage. The “who” of verses 31, 33, and 34, are clearly justified. Who can be against us? Who shall bring a charge? Who is he who condemns? And here, who shall separate us?

Paul’s list of possible separators is not meant to be complete. His first question, though, implies that nothing or no one can separate us. Including us. It’s a “who” question.

MacArthur sees verses 31 to 39 as a “hymn of security.” The “election” passage does not end with the famous predestination verses, but continues to the end of this chapter, letting us know just how rock solid is our standing before God. Is anyone willing to add to the difficulties of this coming list and say that his personal private shortcomings during His walk with God are stronger than God Himself in somehow pulling us apart from God?

Isaiah, on behalf of God, says to constantly wayward Israel that even though a mother could somehow “forget” the child at her breast [and even that is unconceivable!] yet God will not forget His chosen ones. Paul echoes this here. Inseparable. Secure. Now, the list:

“tribulation...”

It means “pressure.” Distress. Just stress, in today’s vernacular. Translated “trouble”. We don’t use the word “tribulation” that often. It’s a general word that has to do with the general array of mental and physical annoyances and difficulties that come our way. They cause us to frown

and get angry and even question. But Christ is faithful in all of our troubles. No separation here. And do you see here that it is not our faithfulness that is at stake, but His. Though trouble comes and troubles shake us, they don't shake him.

"... or distress..."

This word is "narrowness" of room. We talked about it before. Those narrow places in your life. More than general troubles, these may even be life-threatening. They challenge you to the extreme. They push in on every side and make you cry out to God for help. And He is there. Many troubles, many narrow places for the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all.

"...or persecution..."

This is the chasing, the pursuing, of an enemy. That is, an enemy is pursuing you. This is not general. This is specific. You have become effective in your walk and your talk. People are being influenced by your testimony. Lives and ways are being changed. The Kingdom is being advanced. The enemy paints a bulls-eye on your back. You are to be targeted from this time on. Shall the enemy therefore be allowed to come between you and the one who loves you? Paul says no. Persecution won't do it either.

"... or famine..."

You've been promised that God will provide for you. But suddenly the food supply is cut off. You live in a Communist country, a North Korea. The crops fail. The nation goes under. His promise is still, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Do Christians go through times of hunger and poverty and want and need? Ask the believers in North Korea. But have they been forsaken? Are they separated from the love of God? Paul says no. Even hunger will not do it.

“...or nakedness...”

The word can mean nudity or it can refer to a relative nakedness, that is, shabby dress. One set of clothes and it is tattered and torn. Paul says he knew this sort of thing. But he wasn't separated from Christ. There is a nudity that shows a person is separated from Christ. You will find it at the beaches of our land, in certain colonies of shame, and more and more in the fashions of our day. And there is a nakedness that comes from extreme oppression of the enemy. It is the symbol of poverty, yet in Christ even the poorly clad are rich, because they are clothed with Christ Himself.

“... or peril...”

Danger. Paul is not blinking here. He knew danger. In prisons. Scourgings. Stonings. Shipwrecked three times. Dangers from his own people. In the city. In the wilderness. Among false brothers. Hunger and thirst. Fastings. Cold. Naked. Did Paul consider any of this unusual or beneath him as a “King's Kid,” as we love to say? No. Nothing separates us.

“... or sword?”

Or gun? Or missile? Or bomb? Or a weapon of mass destruction? Or Kim Jong Un? Or any weapon formed to destroy you? Why? We go right to Jesus. Nothing separates us here or there or anywhere.

And every one of these things has the human element involved. When life comes against the unsaved, they show they are unsaved by going further from the truth. Look at Revelation and the hardness of heart manifested there. No matter how bad things get, hearts grow harder and harder. With us, we draw nearer and nearer to the One Who promised to be with us. Nothing separates us, not because there is something good in us, but because we have been targeted by Heaven. He lives inside of us. We will not fail ultimately, though we slip and slide now and then. Nothing will separate us.

Need proof? Paul is ready. He has a quote from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. He's quoting Psalm 44:22,

8:36

"As it is written, 'For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'"

This Psalm is attributed to the "sons of Korah," a musical group of Levites descended from, it would seem, the Korah of the rebellion in the wilderness. Something had gone wrong in Israel. Usually when something went wrong in Israel, Israel was the reason. Often God was judging His people for their sins. The laments of Jeremiah in the book by that name are typical of this sort of Psalm.

But here in Psalm 44, nothing is mentioned about Israel's culpability. We don't know why Israel was suffering. We don't know when these events took place. All we know is that Israel was being punished severely by the enemy. They felt abandoned by God. It seemed he was not with them in battle any longer. They were somehow being scattered. All were laughing at them. Great shame.

Still, says this Psalmist, we have not forgotten you. We still love your ways and will follow you, even though all day long they are killing us. All day long it's as though people are taking us poor sheep to the slaughterhouse. We will serve you.

A great choice for a proof text. A great picture to place next to the issues of Paul's day. The church was a derision to the Roman conquerors, an abomination to some of them. The church was just another troublesome Jewish splinter group that needed to be stamped out. The early Christians, as the ones in our day, are being killed every day. Christians of all generations have been taken to the world's slaughtering places and

massacred and martyred for no other reason than that they belong to the God that this world hates.

Nothing can separate us, says Paul. Look at God's people in another era. Belittled. Shamed. Murdered. But they refused to trust in and serve any but the one true God. You can do the same! In fact,

8:37

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us.”

One would think that Paul had said enough when he said that none of these things he mentions will separate us from God. But there is more. We don't merely endure. We conquer. The Greek here is a verb that means to “conquer more”. Not just a mere victory. A landslide victory. A victory plus.

Think of these very Roman persecutions. The Christians endured. And endured. And eventually Christianity was the faith of the entire Empire. I use that illustration cautiously, for we all know how the Christianity of Rome devolved into something not so wonderful. But you get an idea of what Paul is talking about.

We saw it in verse 28. All the things that come our way, good or bad, work together for God's good, and our good. That's more than conquering. We didn't just barely make it through that trial. That trial made its way through us, and made us a better person. We took the lemon and God made the lemonade out of it.

More than that. These momentary light afflictions, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, are producing inside of us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. That's more than overcoming and enduring. That's hyper-overcoming.

The people of this world know nothing of this. They too go through difficult times. They too know how to overcome difficulty and rise to greatness. But there it ends. They are conquerors. But only for a while. We are more than conquerors. Our victory is eternal. The trial comes. It hits and hurts, then it helps and refines and perfects and leads us to eternal glory with Christ, who also had to go through this process of growth and refinement and suffering before he came in ultimate conquest before the Father. He was perfect all along, but the Bible says he was made or kept perfect by what he endured.

Your status in Christ is not static. You have a process to endure for your perfection and glorification. God's in charge of that process and all will be well that ends well. Now let Paul sum up what he has been saying in chapter 8 about the suffering of this time, the groaning in our spirits, the victory that is ours...

8:38

"For I am persuaded that ...

Persuaded of the Holy Spirit. We are not called to rest upon the enthusiasm of a first-century saint. Paul was an eyewitness. Paul was full of the Holy Ghost. Paul was living what he was preaching. This is no mere observation of a well-read teacher. Paul knew that he knew that he knew this truth and he wants you to be rock-solid too: He gives you ten more things that cannot accuse you. Cannot charge you. Cannot condemn you to hell. Cannot separate you. If you weren't already convinced, here's the final list, the final proclamation of your security in Christ. Cling to this list. Believe what Paul believed.

"...neither death..."

Item number one. Death. You say, he gives the worst first. Not at all. Death itself is the least of our worries. For the one in Christ, the moment of death is the same as the moment of the beginning of eternity in Christ.

Joy. Glory. Peace like we have never known. Everything leading up to death can be awful to bear. The battlefield. The sickbed. The natural disaster. The falling bombs. But death itself, for us, is not to be feared at all. In another place Paul says with Hosea, "Death, where is your sting?" Why, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Death will definitely not separate us from the Lord. It will eternally unite us with Him. It's the place where the Devil cannot reach us any more.

"...nor life..."

This second one surprises us, but this life we live right now should be far more concerning to us than that moment of dying. Life is where temptation comes. Life is where trial and trouble come. Life is where persecution assails us. Sickness. Famine. And a host of other attacks. But Paul is clear: none of the things we face in life can separate us either. They certainly threaten, but Christ is holding our hand through the whole series of events we call life.

Death can't separate us. Life can't separate us. That just about covers it all. But let's be even more specific, number three...

"...nor angels..."

Angels? Why would angels try to separate us? Well, are we talking about holy angels or fallen angels? I think it can be assumed (as in Hebrews 1) that the holy angels work with us in ways we don't even see to help us toward our salvation. Paul does not suggest that we have enemies in the hosts of heaven that serve the Lord God.

But demons are also angels. The prince of demons is a fallen angel, as are all his followers. Though heavenly angels support us, demonic angels seek to torment and tempt and accuse us. The battle is real, but Paul says they can't win. They won't separate us. Jesus in us will overcome. Greater is he in us than he in the world, Satan and company.

“...nor principalities...”

We use this word totally differently than the early translators of English Scripture. Webster claims that a principality is the state or territory or office of a prince. Or the position of a principal in a school. Only in third place does he mention that it is an order of angels.

In fact the Greek word *archay* does not necessarily refer to demons. It is a neutral word that simply refers to the “chief”, the “beginning.” The top ruler. Number one. The power to be reckoned with. In Scripture this word usually refers to the rulers of this world. Governors. Kings.

In Ephesians 6, Paul ties it to the corruption in the heavenlies. He sees a hierarchy of evil that begins in the atmosphere above us and continues down into the earth. Satan, his generals, his demons, his men and women on the planet. A cosmos, a web, of evil.

Do you see what Paul is saying here? No individual demon can separate you from God. But should you rise in the ranks of the Kingdom and become a target of the powers that be, whether earthly or demonic, know that you still cannot be grabbed out of Jesus’ grasp. You are secure.

“... nor powers...”

Principalities and powers are used in the same breath by Paul more than once in his writings. Besides here in Romans, see Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 1:16 and 2:15, Titus 3:1. “Powers” in Luke 12:11, and in Romans 13:1, refer to earthly authorities, where Ephesians 3:10 deals with heavenly authorities.

Whether earthly or heavenly, there is a hierarchy of power in the spirit realm. Satan. Principalities under him that rule over portions of the Satanic realm. Under them an entire assortment of spiritual and earthly beings vested with Satanic authority to carry out Satan’s will. But look again, and you will see a much higher Power ruling over all. Satan’s

kingdom is temporary and is totally subject to the limitations of the Father in heaven. We see this in the book of Job.

So these very real authorities in the spirit world cannot separate you from the love of God any more than they separated Job. Oh there was temporary trouble. But the Lord knows those who are His own, and cares for them and brings them through and unites Himself to them in such a way that they are unconquerable. Secure.

“...nor things present nor things to come...”

Notice that “things past” are left out. It is taken for granted that the blood of Jesus has covered all our sins and failures. Our past life will not separate us. Neither will our present life. All the temptations, the worldliness of our culture, the enticements of flesh that surround us. They will not prevail. The words of enemies, even friends, will not bring us down, except to our knees in prayer. Viruses and accidents and storms of all kinds. No. Never.

Things to come. Most of us have a mind full of imaginations about the future. There won't be enough money. My health will fail and I will be left all alone. People will forget me. All my work will be ignored by future generations. The economy will crash. A bomb will fall on my city.

Imagine the worst, if you have nothing better to do in your spare time. None of those things you are imagining, should they all happen to you personally, none of them will have ultimate power against your soul and your status in Heaven.

8:39

“... nor height nor depth...”

Height. The infinity of space? Aliens, asteroids, supernova of the sun, evil spirits in heavenly places? The pinnacle of success on earth? Earthly potentates? My own rising to some measure of glory here?

Depth. The creatures at the bottom of the ocean if I am shipwrecked? The lowest realms of the human condition? Poverty? Seriously evil men?

It doesn't matter how one interprets these two words. The result is the same. You can't touch my eternal soul. It is in the firm grip of Christ, Who is in the firm grip of His Father. No one or nothing snatches me out of His hand. Period. Case closed.

"nor any other created thing..."

Did we leave something out? Do we get the picture yet? Nothing! Only God could do it, and he has promised never to leave or forsake us.

"...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which in in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Don't try to feel His love. Sometimes you can't. Look at Calvary. Don't try to understand His love. You never will. Look to Calvary. Don't try to earn His love. Impossible. The love has already been poured out at Calvary. He died for you, then sent the message down through the ages to your heart, individually. Look to Jesus and be secure.

Keep it simple. When the father draws you to Himself, Jesus gives you eternal life. And you will never perish. Ever. He saw you, He predestined you, He called you, He justified you, he will glorify you, and all through that process, no one can condemn, nothing can separate. It's finished.

Paul now takes a three-chapter side trail, telling of his personal feelings for Israel, but in the process, revealing eternal truths about that nation that have caused much thought and even controversy through the years. They are probably the three most difficult chapters in the letter.

What is Israel in God's sight? What is God's plan for national Israel, if there still is such an entity? Should we only think in terms of "spiritual Israel" and simply think of Israel as the church? These questions are answered.

And in dealing with these issues, Paul also offers some of his most critical and specific teachings regarding election, which he only touched on in chapter 8. Much food for thought ahead. Stand by.

9:1

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying..."

Affirmations like these were necessary. Jewish believers were at a crossroads in their existence. To hear the Gospel meant serious changes in their outlook. Some of those changes were threatening. Was Paul against Moses all of a sudden, the one we Jews have followed for a millennium and a half? Is the law suddenly unholy, unnecessary? Are non-Jews now allowed into the Kingdom simply by believing in Jesus? These are things he has already addressed. Many were having trouble believing it all. Some accused Paul of deliberately perverting the teachings they knew and loved for so long. Was he a liar?

He says here, No, you can trust me in what I am about to say. Twice he says it, and even claims that the Christ, Jewish Messiah, is in what he is saying. Believe me, for the sake of Christ.

"...my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,"

Now he appeals to another Person of the Godhead, who lives inside of him and has cleansed his conscience. No, the purely human conscience is not to be trusted. It makes its decisions based on the input of years of teaching and experience. But that teaching and experience is corrupted

because mankind is corrupted. Your conscience okays things that are perfectly abominable, and denies things that are perfectly acceptable.

But when the Spirit of God comes in, and the conscience is slowly reformed in the image of God Himself, when a new creation has been put together inside of you, that conscience can be trusted, and can serve as a basis of truth. In Acts 23:1 we see Paul standing before the highest court in Israel claiming that he has lived in good conscience before God up to that day. For that he got a slap in the mouth by an attendant of the court. We don't know how this statement in verse 1 affected the readers, but some may not have been impressed. For us, it is enough for Christ's man, full of the Holy Ghost, to affirm that he is telling the truth. Our own spirit bears witness with Paul that what we are about to read is believable... though incredibly so.

9:2

“that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.”

Well, that's not so unbelievable. There's more coming. But we should take a look at this statement. It would be viewed as a negative confession in our positive confession generation. Oh, I'm just so sorrowful and grieving about something all the time. Continually.

Get over it Paul. Life is beautiful. Think happy thoughts. That's how he would be counseled today.

Paul was no stranger to joy and he counsels God's people to rejoice in the Lord always. No contradiction there. In the midst of sorrow, we rejoice in God. Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. This sorrow and grief will be found in all true followers of Jesus. We sorrow over our sins daily. We grieve for the lost. The lost in our family, our neighborhood, even our church. We weep with those who weep.

Our life is not a party. It is the carrying of a cross. It is the bearing of a yoke. It is much lighter than the burden of sin, but it is a burden nonetheless. Paul is about to tell us what part of this burden is for him, and to what extremes he will go to carry this burden.

9:3

“For I could wish...”

I could find no translation except the Rheims that carries the Greek idea literally here. The Textus Receptus interlinear has it, “for I was wishing...” What follows here is not a hypothetical with Paul. The Greek itself reads, “For, wishing I myself to be a curse...” Or as the Rheims has it, “I was wishing...”

What was Paul wishing?

“... that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”

How awful. An apostle of Jesus Christ wishing the curse of Christ upon himself? Unprecedented? No, not really. Exodus 32:32 exposes the heart of one named Moses. In the heat of a similar compassionate emotion, Moses begs God to forgive the same people, the “brethren” of Paul, the Israelites. And if God will not forgive those people? “Blot my name out of your book!”

So what of it? Both Paul and Moses knew that God would never blot out, would never curse, says the skeptic. These guys were just trying to make a point, even score a point, with God. They didn’t really mean it.

Maybe you would do something like that. Maybe I would. And to put it down on paper so people would read it and think ever so highly of me. Oh, God, save the Jews or send me to hell! But these men, no. They meant it from the bottom of their Spirit-filled hearts. Now you know why

Paul begins this discussion by saying, I am telling the truth! I'm not lying! God's Spirit and God's Son are lined up with me and my conscience and we are all saying the same thing: I am so sorrowful for Israel that I would take the curse of God on myself if it meant their salvation!

Jesus would say something like this inside of Paul? Oh yes, Jesus already said something like this when He went to the cross and took the curse of Israel and many Gentiles too. Paul is following His Master here. If it would save them, I'd die in their place!

Yes, the work was already done, but Paul was in earnest here. He goes on now to describe who are his countrymen, or relatives, in the natural, according to the flesh. He is not using that word in the evil sense, the fallen human nature, but in the human sense. These are my human relatives, and they are very special to me and to God. Who are they?

9:4

“who are Israelites...”

For seven pages (in my Bible) Paul has been talking about the human condition, and how it has been addressed by Jesus Christ. He has spoken of depravity and salvation, Jew and Gentile. But in speaking often of His people He just has to stop here and say how burdened he is for his own people. He will show us how His people, who had every advantage, stumbled and fell, and were in such grave danger of losing everything. In sharing his heart with us, though, he reveals some very important secrets that we must consider carefully. First, the advantages of the Israelites, that he only hinted at in chapter 3:

“... to whom pertain the adoption...”

“Whose the adoption”, reads the Greek. Not individual adopted sons, but a nation adopted. This is not something Israel has to look forward to, but looks back historically to. They have been adopted, nationally, as a son.

The Scriptures are clear, and are the first part of the mystery of these chapters that we must grasp: Israel was the adopted son. What did Moses say to Pharaoh? "Israel is my son, my firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). What did God say through Hosea about the way He loved this child? "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1). These very words were used in connection with the calling of the child Jesus out of that same Egypt fourteen hundred years later, but they don't cancel the original meaning. Israel was a firstborn son, precious to the Father.

Not only that, Israel as a nation was a recipient of

"...the glory,"

What does that mean? I quote MacArthur here: "God blessed Israel by revealing to her His own presence in the Shekinah glory. In that unique and inexplicable way, God dwelt in the midst of His people." He goes on to relate how the glory cloud appeared in the wilderness, and especially at Sinai. Then in the tent of meeting, in the Holy of Holies, the ark of the covenant. God showed a portion of His glory to Moses upon request. The fire of God fell on sacrifices and manifested itself to prophets. These were truly a glory-filled people. And then,

"the covenants,"

Plural? Were they not simply given what we call the "Old" Covenant or Testament, while we have the New? Paul is evidently going back to Abraham's covenant, and its renewal to Isaac and Jacob. He must be thinking of the eternal Kingdom promised to David. And of course the covenant spelled out in detail and written in stone, at Mt. Sinai. The ten commandments. The ceremonial and moral law of Moses. But not really of Moses. Of God. Promises, oaths, agreements, made with no other nation on earth, but made in good faith with Israel. He covers a little of the same ground in his next item,

“the giving of the law.”

Until Israel became a nation, law was in the heart, in the conscience. Ideas from good men were passed along from generation to generation. One can assume that men like Seth and Enoch knew God so intimately that they taught their children His ways. But at Sinai, with Israel the nation, the people of God, it was different. From this day there would be a record of God’s very thoughts. There would be no excuse from this day on. God had spoken. To His people. In writing. Then Paul goes on,

“[and] the service of God”

Simply “and the service” in the originals. The word is *latreia* and refers to a particular ministry, namely a divine one. That is, worship. Some translations use “worship” here. Ministry to God. Service to God. This is why we have worship “services”. When we go into the house of God, we minister to, or serve God by singing and proclaiming His truths and praying.

To Israel, and to no other nation, was committed an entire program for Divine worship. Much of Exodus, essentially all of Leviticus, parts of Numbers, are given to the personnel and activities of those who would minister in the tabernacle.

David and others added songs that could enhance the worship. Then God gave His people, via Solomon, a proper place for the proper worship: the Temple.

Glorious Israel! Spoken to by God Himself. Serving God in God’s special way! Not only that:

“and the promises...”

Paul seems to be working his way through the Old Testament. The adoption, Exodus. The glory, also Exodus and other places. The covenants,

Genesis through Samuel. The law, Exodus through Deuteronomy. The service, the books of Moses plus Psalms and 1 Kings. Now the promises. Here, we go to the prophets.

Israel is promised eventual victory in a Kingdom ruled by Messiah. Israel is promised a Saviour who shall first be rejected, then win a universal victory. Israel is promised a new heart, a new covenant. And we Christians look at all this and say, No, this is mine! True enough, it is yours, Gentile believer. But it was all first promised to Israel, and may we never forget it! Israel,

9:5

“of whom are the fathers...”

He speaks here of the fathers of the faith. Yes, even our Christian faith. These were the men God called out of paganism to believe in the one true God. To pass on a heritage of faithfulness to that God. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel. Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel. All of these men belonged in some way to Israel. This is our heritage, church. How we must love what God loves.

And of course, Israel’s greatest Treasure, her most sublime gift to the human family...

“and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came...”

How anti-Semitic Christians get around the fact that Jesus Christ was a Jew, descended from King David and Abraham, is a mystery. Salvation is of the Jews, as said Jesus to the woman at the well of Samaria because Jesus is of the Jews! You cannot enter heaven unless you enter it through the Jewish Messiah.

Of course we understand what Paul means here when he says “according to the flesh.” His mother was Jewish. His adoptive father was Jewish. But

His real Father was God Himself. It is this fact that leads the apostle to add a doxology to the end of his introduction to Israel:

“who is over all,”

A fact we do not consider often enough in the light of this present evil world. We speak of His coming when He shall rule the world. We know of His Lordship in our personal lives and churches. But He is in fact “over all” now. All authority has been given to Him now. The powers that be, yes, the evil ones, are ordained of God to fulfill His purposes. We cannot possibly fathom the depths of the wisdom of God in all of this, but He is truly Lord. Now. And,

“the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

Let us be clear here. The NKJV English order is “blessed God”, but the Greek and the KJV has it, “God blessed” and connects that idea to the one before it, “Who is over all,” namely Christ. This is a clear pronouncement of the Deity of Jesus, in either version. “Who is over all God blessed forever...” Again, he is not saying, as we do, “Jesus is over all, bless God.” He’s saying, Jesus IS the blessed God.

As for eternally,

We have been given eternal life. But there was a starting point in time when that life entered us. Though we have no end now, we did have a beginning. Not so with our Lord and God. No beginning for Him. No ending. We see Him born in Bethlehem and dying on a cross. But when we step back with the eyes only God can give us, we see the eternally blessed One “without beginning of days nor end of life” as says the writer of Hebrews.

Paul had to stop and praise Him a moment before he continued with the thought on his heart, namely God’s love for Israel, and what should be our appreciation for that people.

9:6

“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.”

Verse 6 begins with a thought that does not follow the preceding two verses, which contain a list of reasons that Israel is special to God and ought to be special to us. Instead, verse 6 takes us back to verses 2 and 3. Israel makes me sad. My fellow Jews are a burden on my heart. Everywhere I go, I preach to them first, and they in the main reject what I have to say. Their Messiah has come, the fulfillment of their own Bible’s prophecies stands before them, and they don’t get it. I am so burdened over this. So much so that I would take their punishment if I could.

But. It’s not like all is lost. God’s word to Israel over the centuries, from Sinai until the last prophet, has brought some fruit. It has not “failed”, says the Greek. God’s word never returns void or empty. God was moving in Israel. He had some followers. He still does. And the Word given to them has spilled over into the Gentile world. Behold Ruth and Rahab and the Gentiles in your own church at Rome, not to mention you Jews to whom I speak. What is going on?

Next Paul unveils a mystery that was and is so hard for the true Jew to comprehend:

“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”

Word for word in the Greek, “For not all which of Israel, those Israel.” Paul here defines Israel two ways, and from now on we must discern which way he is going with the name. The first group, those of or from “Israel”, are the ones we’ve been talking about so far in the text. Israelites in the flesh. Jews. The nation Israel. The whole crowd in the wilderness and in Egypt. Everyone who went into the Promised Land, and everyone also who died in the wilderness. Every conceivable descendant of Abraham and Sarah through Isaac. Jews. Physical Jews.

But there's more. There's another Israel in this text. Paul says you can be "of Israel" or "from Israel" and still not be Israel. This latter definition will become plainer as we move on, but we must recognize it here. There is another Israel that does not gain its identity from circumcision or blood. It is possible to be Israel without being "Jewish." If that's a revelation to you, imagine how it hit the ultra-orthodox circumcised-on-the-eighth-day Jew of Paul's time.

Wait a minute. Is this really revelatory? Is it brand new in Romans? Have we not forgotten Romans 2? It's been a long while, but we need to go back. Paul has already dropped a major hint about all this in 2:28-3:1,

"He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit...What advantage then has the Jew?"

Do you see that in this passage also, Paul uses "Jew" in two different ways? There is an outward "Jew" and an inward "Jew". In Chapter 3 he goes on to talk of the outward Jew, Israel, and the advantages of the nation Israel. 3:3 even prepares us for 9:6, "What if some did not believe?" / "It is not that the word of God has taken no effect."

So, keep in mind that in Paul's thinking, and we believe he received his wisdom from the Holy Ghost, there are indeed two entities known as Israel. Two kinds of Jews. Two seeds who come from Abraham.

9:7

"nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham;"

Just as it is possible for an Israelite not to be an Israelite in God's eyes, so it is possible for someone born of Abraham not to be a Jew at all. Abraham is the father of the faithful. Abraham is the one who got

everything started. But you recall there was a mistake made at the very beginning. Abraham believed God finally, but at first he had trouble with believing, and tried to help God keep His promise. This child born of human effort was not the child God had in mind as the true seed. He had to wait a few years. Isaac was born by simply believing God and waiting on Him.

“but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ ”

Here Paul quotes from Genesis 21:12. “In Isaac shall be called to you a seed” would be the Greek order. God is going to call a people to Himself. One Person in particular will be called. That Person, that nation, is to be called through the line of Isaac, not the firstborn Ishmael. But Paul goes on to interpret this calling process a bit further:

9:8

“That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God;”

Paul says here even more than we have seen so far. He is not talking, ultimately, about the child Ishmael vs the child Isaac. He looks behind both of their births and says that children of God in general are those who come to God in simple faith. Those who do not come in faith, but add their plans and programs and efforts, are not children of God at all. This is bigger than two boys of Abraham. This is the division of all humanity into believers and non-believers.

“but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”

A person must be born from above. God must decree that a person is to be saved. God decreed that Isaac was to be the appointed son, and so he was. Ishmael was a son of fleshly contrivance. Notice that “flesh” here is not about flesh and blood, for both sons were flesh and blood. This is the flesh of our carnal nature. This is the old Abraham in all of us trying to

control and manipulate and make things happen that were never supposed to happen. These things always fail.

But when God makes a promise, He makes it come to pass. That's Isaac. That's the born again of all time. That's Jesus, the ultimate Son of promise.

So there was an Israel that came about as a promise of God to Abraham through Isaac. But let's keep our eyes open to see the greater truth that Paul is teaching. Flesh loses. Promise wins.

9:9

"For this is the word of promise:"

Paul is now going to give us examples from the Old Testament as to how this promise thing works. First example is in Genesis 18:14.

" 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.' "

You all know the story. In Genesis 12, Abraham is promised a nation. In Genesis 15 he is more specific: he shall have an heir, and that out of his own body. It was not specific enough for Abraham and Sarah. This is where they began to stretch things a little and they came up with a plan whereby Abraham would impregnate Sarah's servant, but claim the son as her own. Thus the prophecy would literally come to pass, and the waiting would be over. Sounds like schemes we come up with from time to time.

In Genesis 17, the promise is more specific still. God has not changed His mind about what he is going to do, in spite of Abraham's disobedience. The child that is coming, says God, will be born of Sarah. Ishmael is not the child of promise after all.

More time passes. Fourteen years after Ishmael. Then the passage to which Paul refers. The child is coming soon. Sarah herself will have a son.

God keeps His promises. Literally. Exactly. No need for human interpretation or human assistance. Our job: just believe the promise and let God be God and keep that promise. Those who are able to do this will be blessed with faithful Abraham. Those who do not are destined to pay a serious price, as did that same Abraham before he could fully trust God.

9:10

“And not only this,”

Paul is not changing the subject here, but he is moving on to another example of how promise works, and flesh loses.

“but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac...”

Fast forward in the book of Genesis. The promised son, Isaac, called here “our father”, that is our forefather, one of the patriarchs who founded the nation Israel, is born, grows, marries, and is, with his wife Rebecca, expecting twins. This was not the age of the ultrasound technology, but God Himself had revealed to Isaac’s wife what was going on. Notice the “also” here. Rebecca “also”. Just like her mother-in-law Sarah, Rebecca herself is conceiving. This is significant because, like Sarah, Rebecca went through a period of barrenness – we know not how long – that was so severe as to have Isaac corresponding with God, as did his father Abraham, about a solution to this problem. Thankfully, Isaac and Rebecca decided to pray and wait only. No schemes in between.

And in time, like Sarah and Abraham, Isaac and Rebecca, with no outside help, were able to have a child. That is, two children. And here the story gets complicated, but not for God. Just as God had already chosen between Ishmael and Isaac, He is choosing between these two sons. Now the narrative takes on another color. We are not just talking about God’s promises, but God’s choices. And from these stories and the one to follow, Paul is going to draw some conclusions about the ways of God that

he wants us, with the Roman Christians, to understand. He has already approached this subject of election in the last chapter. Here he nails it down so strongly that the message is beyond questioning.

One man, one woman, two children. But before we find out God's ultrasound message to Rebecca, Paul inserts some parenthetical explanation of where he is going with this story, and where we should go with him.

9:11

“(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil...”

For the record we need to add here that parentheses are not found in Greek writings. These are modern marks. Different translations add the marks, if they add them at all, in different places. The KJV and NKJV put all of verse 11 in parentheses, which seems to follow the Greek. But others, including the interlinear which follows the Greek word for word, don't insert the marks until part “b” of the verse, “that the purpose of God etc”.

This added explanation is very helpful, regardless of the marks around it. As with Isaac and Ishmael, God had made a choice before the children were born. No chance to prove themselves good or evil. No track record to establish. Then on what basis?

“that the purpose of God according to election might stand...”

Why did God choose Jacob? Why Isaac? He had a purpose in mind. He had a people in mind. He had a Savior in mind. That much we know. We do not presume to know the fullness of God's purposes. We only know that He has such purposes, and that His choices are based on Himself and what is good and true and right for Himself.

And those purposes must stand, must remain. This is how He has worked from the beginning and how He shall forever work. He is the sovereign God Who does what He likes and it's always right, whether we can figure it out or not.

Two examples. Two sets of brothers. One is chosen, one is not. These are the cases Paul sets before the Romans as demonstrations of how He will work in our own lives in the church.

“... not of works but of Him who calls.)”

Why are you saved? Not of works. God called you, you heard the call and desired to answer it. All grace. Why? No answer. It just happened. Once you were lost and you knew it. Now you are saved, and you know it. This is what election is about.

For those concerned that Paul is going off the deep end here, stick around until we get to the very next chapter, where man's responsibility kicks in. Nothing changes in the heavenly principle, but we are led to see the mystery from another perspective. It's all of God that you are saved, but somehow you were and are a part of the acting out of the call of God. Now allow Paul to get back to his illustration, since he has explained what it means:

9:12

“it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’”

This is Genesis 25:23. Here is the decree from Heaven. You have two sons in your womb, Rebecca. They are already struggling, and it bothers you. That is because these two sons and their descendants will be fighting for a long time, not just now. And I now decree the winner of that fight: Jacob will be number one, (though he is born second) and Esau number two (though he is born first.)

Did it happen? Did Esau the man in some way serve Jacob? Esau was the favorite son of Isaac. They shared a lot of things. Esau was a man's man. A hunter. A provider. He took charge. After the deceitfulness of his brother kicked in, Jacob was gone. So Esau did not serve Jacob then. They were many miles apart for many years.

After the separation, and Jacob returned to his homeland, did the servant relationship develop? Esau was a prosperous man in his own right. Jacob was building a family through several reversals, and struggled often. But the two men did not even meet, except when Dad died, and they jointly held the funeral service.

The answer to this mystery is important. It will help you to understand the next difficult verse.

When did Esau serve Jacob? Not until Esau had become the nation of Edom and Jacob had become the nation of Israel. After that there is a series of confrontations and judgments involving the superiority of Israel over the Edomites. You'll see Edom's history go downhill as early as the trek of the Israelites through the wilderness. Prophecies about Edom's doom are in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah. Ultimately Edom vanished from history, while Israel is still here and has a glorious future.

All of that was included in the decree of the Lord to Rebecca, and the further word of Malachi, that Paul quotes next:

9:13

“as it is written , ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated.’”

Jacob is Israel the nation. Esau is Edom the nation. A millennium and a half have passed. A people has formed from these two men. The Edomites have long since turned away from the God of Abraham and Isaac. They are idolaters. Their culture is corrupt. Their ways are hated by a holy God, and judgment is upon them.

But that does not solve the dilemma that this verse suggests. For Israel too had gotten corrupt by now. Israel too was deserving of judgment, and received it, and is still scheduled to receive more. The difference in the two nations is brought out in a further reading of Malachi 1. The Edomites vow to rebuild after their devastation. God says, No, you won't. You are finished. And they were. And are.

Israel, on the other hand will indeed rebuild. More than once. They keep rising. And one day Israel will rise one last time and stay risen eternally.

Why? Paul is trying to tell us. Divine decree. "The older will serve the younger." "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." God has sovereignly chosen Israel and Israel's favorite Son, the Son also of God, Jesus Christ. Why, how? Paul in the next passage shows us how. But when we are finished reading it, we will still not understand.

Nor will you understand, Sir or Madam, why He has chosen you out of all the people He could have called to Himself. This side of glory, there is no answer that our brain can comprehend. It all seems unfair, improper, for God to choose some, and not choose others. That's what verse 14 says:

9:14

"What shall we say then?"

Paul seems to enjoy setting up impossible situations, then asking a question like this. "What shall we say to this?" In 8:31 he has just introduced election, and asks this question. In 7:7 he tells the Romans we are freed from the law of Moses, and asks this question. In 6: 1 and 15 we are not under the law but under grace, so what do we say to that?

So what do we say now? God chooses some over others. What's your response?

“Is there unrighteousness with God?”

Surely that was the thought of some. “That’s not fair” is the anthem of the unbeliever. All must be just and equal. It is the desire for justice and equality on Earth that has made the planet the home of the most insidious injustices of government. Socialism, Communism, Fascism, all set out to correct evils, to stamp out poverty, to bring equity to all. Men try to bring about their own form of righteousness, but in the end will yield to the fact that God’s way is the best way. God gives everyone the chance to live right, and all men prove by their stubborn wills and hearts that they cannot do it.

Then He chooses the most unlikely of all to bring about true righteousness in the life and in society. One day the world, the righteous world, will be ruled by the Least likely. The chosen few. Today they are not mighty or smart or rich. But they are chosen. And God will be seen to be the only Fair Player after all.

Is there unrighteousness with God? Can the One Who created all be accused of any shortcoming? Can the One Who willingly died on a cross be slandered with the epithet of unrighteous?

Ezekiel had to deal with this same allegation (18:29-30). “The house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?”

Yes, indeed. Is there unrighteousness with God? For the eighth time in Romans (and there will be two more in chapter 11, Paul says,

“Certainly not!”

Literally, “Not may it be!” Impossible! The idea should never cross your mind! And then Paul goes on to use the Biblical illustration that may be the most difficult for us to hear in these days of “fairness” among us. We have become like the ones in Ezekiel’s day. So many of God’s people do

not study God's Word. We have drunk in the culture and the philosophies of men, and coupled them with our own fallen nature's way of deceiving ourselves. When we come to a passage like this, we recoil. But let's come to it anyway. Truth is always good for the soul.

Why so certainly not, Paul?

9:15

"For He says to Moses,"

He, being God. And the Moses quote is from the second book of Moses, Exodus 33:19. The interesting thing to me is that this declaration of God is in the context of God showing a portion of His glory to Moses, upon Moses' request. Pharaoh is not involved in this decree. That's another example of Paul, coming in the next verses.

The idea seems to come out of nowhere, by our thinking. God says, I am not going to go with you to the Promised Land. Moses argues this conclusion, and God says He will go. Moses wants confirmation: Show Me your glory. God says, My goodness will pass before you, and My name... then comes the portion Paul quotes:

" 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' "

There's something about this statement that is an identifier of who our God is. Moses wanted some manifestation of God. God says, I'm going to show you my goodness, and here it is. Mercy and compassion on anyone I want to show it. He says earlier to Moses that He is going to do what Moses asks because Moses has found grace in God's eyes. He has already had mercy and compassion for Moses, and now that will go to the House of Israel.

Why Moses? Why Israel? Just because. These are the unknowns. But believe that once God has mercy on a nation, that nation will eventually be blessed. That seems to be the point of all of these examples. Paul now draws a conclusion.

Based on God's unconditional promise regarding Isaac's birth, based on God's clear choosing of Jacob over Esau, based on God's own declaration to Moses about God's right to have mercy on whomever He desires, here is what Paul now declares:

9:16

"So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

The Greek flow: "... not of the one willing, and not of the one running, but of the showing mercy of God."

What is not of him who wills or runs? What are we talking about? Salvation. Being adopted into God's family, being a child of God. You don't arrive at that condition by just wanting to. You don't get there by trying real hard. You get there when God has mercy on you.

This is a very difficult concept for many. The other religions of the world have a hook and a list. The hook is usually a relatively easy entrance requirement coupled with an array of advantages for you joining them. Our religion gives peace. Our religion gives prosperity. Our religion is the original. Our religion will get you to Heaven. Our religion is the only religion. Ours is the way of truth. And all you have to do is say a few words, or come to our meetings, or invest a little money, and you're in. The hook. The desire. You're promised a bill of goods at what seems to be an affordable price.

But Paul says here that true salvation is not about "willing" your way in. "I think I'll join the church." How do you get in? Oh, just come three

Sundays, give one offering, say the formula, and you are in. Many people think they are saved because they “joined the church.” We handle our faith much like the religions of the world. But willing your way to Heaven will not work.

Nor will the list save you. You see, once you get in these religions, and many churches, you become slowly aware of a list of things they didn’t tell you at first, things you must do to get to Heaven. Oh, you can stay in their group and keep paying your money, but no promises about eternity.

The list is captivating to many. Some people actually like the list. A way to earn their entrance into the Promised Land. Pay your money. Show up. Eat certain foods, don’t eat others. Dress this way. Not that way. Go here but don’t go there. Say these prayers a certain way and a certain time. Oh, the list is endless. And it is demanding. Do this or hell is waiting for you.

Paul says that true salvation is not about “running” either. Paul agrees with Jesus that in order for a man to see and enter the Kingdom of God, he must be born again, from above. You become a son of God by birth. And once a son of God, all the privileges of Heaven are yours now and forever. No effort involved. No willing involved.

Did you will yourself into your mother’s womb? “I think I’d like to be born.” Once you got in there, did you try real hard to grow properly for those nine months? So it is with your second birth, your salvation.

It’s all about grace *and God* and mercy *and God* and compassion *and God*.

9:17

“For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh,...”

Yet another example. This is number four. And what is he trying to prove in these illustrations? That God chooses. That the number and identity of the children of God is a secret known only to God. God chooses Isaac over

Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and now, Israel over Egypt, Moses over Pharaoh. He raises powers up and brings powers down. And all of it is for His glory and our mouths are to be shut in the face of it. Let God be God. Paul is now quoting from Exodus again, in 9:16.

“ ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ ”

The context is plague seven. The Lord has been slowly destroying the nation. He has been taking this slow route for a reason, He says in verse 15. He lets Pharaoh know that He could have cut him off a long time ago with one pestilence, one huge event, and Egypt would have been history, like other nations that came against Israel. But His purpose in Egypt is different. He is going to use Egypt as a perpetual sign and testimony to the nations of the world, that God is all-powerful and to be praised and honored. That to touch Israel is to touch God’s heart and God’s very name and reputation.

And so the nations rise and are allowed to remain. But they all need to take heed to the wisdom of the second Psalm, “...be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.”

When God is ready and your iniquity is full, you shall be like Egypt or Assyria or Babylon, and go down in an instant. God will show His power in the nations, either by their yielding to His authority over them and being a conduit of His reign, or by their rebelling and receiving proper judgment before the eyes of men.

You think the Kims of Korea are getting away with it? They are being raised up that one day God’s power will be shown in them, and God’s name will be declared in all the earth.

The Muslim nations that blaspheme the name of Jesus? Are they going to go unnoticed in the Heavens? God raises them up to discipline His people and accomplish whatever else He desires, but eventually they come down as all powers that oppose Christ come down, and God receives the glory. Wait and see.

God chooses. He ordains. He rises up and casts down. He lets some live long and cuts others off short. All because of His own purposes. And let no man challenge the plan of God for the nations or for the elect within those nations.

9:18

“Therefore...”

That word signals another conclusion coming. First conclusion in verse 16: God will decide by His mercy who is His chosen child. Now,

“...He has mercy on whom He wills...”

That goes back to verse 15. I will have mercy on whom I will. Isaac. Jacob. Nothing new here...

“...and whom He wills He hardens”

This is new. This is difficult. But in Paul’s flow of thoughts, it is necessary to add. God hardens.

And since Paul has introduced Pharaoh into the text as an example, we should look at that story a minute or two. Who hardened Pharaoh’s heart? If you are on one side of the argument, you have to maintain that Pharaoh hardened his own heart first, and then after a while God just agreed with that hardness and brought it to a conclusion.

So God was waiting on Pharaoh to make his move before God could make his? Thus all the people who arrive or don't arrive in Heaven are there because of human will. This is the principle that Paul has just denied. Salvation is not of one who wills. Man's will is to sin. God's will is to have mercy on some sinners.

Let's trace that Pharaoh story, though. Twice before the first hardening of his heart, God promises that he, God, will harden it. 4:21, "I will harden his heart." And in 7:3, at the final commissioning of Moses and Aaron, God says it again, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart."

It is later in that same chapter 7 that we see the first hardening. The KJV helps us along the theological path by simply stating that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Later translations wanted to give the Hebrew its due, and simply translated, "Pharaoh's heart grew hard" (NKJV). Or Pharaoh's heart was hardened, passive.

I think it is fair to say that the KJV had the right idea in mind, even if their Hebrew is a little lacking there. God had said He would harden it. And God hardened it. That's the point.

And what of the other incidents of hardening in the story. 8:15, 32 ; and 9:34 are the three passages that give credit to the King for hardening his heart. But in no uncertain terms, either the passive or a clear mention of the Lord are indicated in 8:19; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8. All of which leads us to believe that even in the places where it is said that Pharaoh hardened his heart, it means that he did so at the bidding of the Lord.

Because, God hardens.

Joshua 11 tells us of kings whose hearts were hardened by the Lord so that they would come against Moses' successor and be defeated by him. Isaiah declares through John (12:40) that God hardened the hearts of unbelieving Israel so that they would not hear the truth when it came.

Do men harden their own hearts? Yes, the warnings come to us: Don't let it happen. There is human responsibility.

But Paul's point here is that God hardens, and when He does it, no one is to cry foul. As Paul imagines the recipients of his letters doing, in the next verse:

9:19

"You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

A fair question, you say. Paul disagrees and says "Hush!" You think as a human thinks, Paul is telling you how God thinks.

So God comes along and hardens Pharaoh. Pharaoh, in the hardness of his heart, rejects Moses, God's miracles, God's very message to Him. Because his heart is hard. And God made it that way. And after all of Pharaoh's rejection and hindrances to the plan of God, God punishes him.

Not fair! Pharaoh could not do anything but sin, because his heart was hardened. By God's will it was hardened. What say ye to an argument like that? We all know what Paul said.

Well, you say, Pharaoh was evil all his life. It was just catching up with him. God decided to use this man who was already hardened to the true God.

And Noah. He was a good man, and therefore given grace. Isn't that how the Genesis account unfolds?

So good men are given grace in reward for their goodness and bad men are given hardness for their badness?

But what do you do with Paul. A very bad man. Given grace to become a very good man. And some of you? You see, if you go the works route with the Bible's men or men today, you eliminate grace and sovereignty and God, altogether... Beware lest you put your human reasoning ahead of God's sovereign will. Well does Paul say now,

9:20

"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?"

O man. Anyone who thinks like this is thinking like men think. We think we have figured out the ways of God and we neatly categorize and analyze and make everything fit into a pattern that makes us look good and God look bad. Stop it! Stop answering God like you know better than He does.

Man says, People don't rise from the dead. Jesus was a person. Therefore He did not rise from the dead.

Man says, there's no way some Creator-God spoke an entire universe into existence in six literal days. We know how long it takes to form matter and life. Therefore, the Bible is wrong, and we are right.

Man says, this sin business is overdone. Mankind is basically good. So there was no need for some celestial Savior to come and save us from our "sin." We will save ourselves.

For millennia, man has been replying against God. Paul stops him here. Stop elevating yourself.

As MacArthur says, "...God...seems totally capricious and cruel to worldly, carnal minds which accept only what fits their preconceived ideas of right and wrong, justice and injustice. Consequently, they judge even God by their own finite, biased, and sin-tainted standards."

“Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’”

Paul certainly knew his Bible. Here he uses the words of Isaiah, 29:16. “...Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay? For shall the thing made say of Him who made it, ‘He did not make me’”? Or shall the thing formed say of Him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’”?

So much of our world is like that. Little created beings saying, I am not created. I just happened. “We can’t explain where we come from and those who think they have it figured out are proud.” We say, Yes we can explain where we come from and that makes us humble. We know who we are. And we know we are totally foolish to speak against the One Who created us.

Paul is telling us that the Creator made mankind to be conformed to His will and purposes. If Pharaoh was made for a specific purpose and lived out that purpose under the decree of God, so be it. Paul continues his response to “man” in the verses that follow.

Jeremiah, in that classic chapter about God’s sovereignty, is invited (in chapter 18) to take a trip to the potter’s house. The potter was just then making something on his wheel, but it wasn’t turning out right. So he started over. That’s the prerogative of the potter.

That’s the prerogative of anyone who makes anything. I can make what I want. If it doesn’t turn out right, I can throw it out, or set it aside for some inferior use. That’s what verse 21 is about:

9:21

“Does not the potter have power over the clay...”

What a perfect illustration the Holy Spirit uses in Jeremiah and here. Clay. Dirt. The earth. God scooped up a handful of dirt, fashioned it and formed

it into a body, breathed His own breath into it. And that hunk of clay is going to talk back to God? Like the automobile is going to make demands of the manufacturer? Like your desk is going to tell you not to sit at it any longer? Like that lamp will refuse to give light?

We are creation! We need to go back to the beginning of the story regularly and remind ourselves. God is in charge.

“from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

Most want to agree with what’s being said until this part of the passage. Sure, God is in charge! Sure God is sovereign! He is the Creator! He made me, not we ourselves.

But Paul says, and Jeremiah records also, that God selects which vessels shall be honorable usable glorified vessels and which ones will be there only to make God look great by their dishonorable use.

Even pagan Nebuchadnezzar received this revelation. After God revealed his dreams, after God sent him to his backyard to eat grass, he got it (Daniel 4:35): “... He does according to His will among the host of heaven (angels) and among the inhabitants of the earth (people), and none can stay His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’”

Last chapter: Those that He foreknew, He predestinated. Those that He predestinated (same group) He called. Those that He called He justified. Those that he justified He glorified. Is Paul not being consistent with His theology here? If the potter can pick and choose which of his creations will be used for what purposes, cannot God Almighty?

Was not Isaac chosen for honor and Ishmael for dishonor? Was not Jacob chosen for honor and Esau for dishonor? Was not Moses chosen for honor and Pharaoh for dishonor? This is a difficult passage to accept, but it is not so difficult to understand.

God does what He wants because He is God. And Paul isn't finished with this line of thought yet:

9:22

"What if God..."

Not supposition. This is not the "what if" of theory. What if we add baking soda to this vinegar? What if I could fly? What if the moon really were made of cheese?

No, this is the what if of "So what?" "What's it to ya?" In fact, the "what" is not in the Greek except by implication. I see that only the KJV even suggests that fact by putting "what" in italics. The Greek reads, "And if God, willing to show..."

If God wants to make things and use those things for His own glory, what of it?

"wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known..."

God gets angry. Then. And still. The sins that were making Him angry before Jesus died are still making Him angry. Jesus' sacrifice for sin did not make people stop sinning. It gave mankind a way to escape the anger of God.

Take a look around if you don't believe me. And as long as people are sinning, God is going to be angry. "God is angry with the wicked every day," Psalm 7:11. His wrath is being revealed from heaven in any number of ways. We old folks like to say that America is not the country we grew up in. True. And we're not talking about progress. We're talking about regress. Moving backward.

Imagine the Creator looking at the planet He made. It's not the same as it was in the Garden. It's not the same as it was after the flood. Not the same as it was when Abraham was called, as wicked as that time was. Not the same as when Jesus was here. Not the same as when machines began to appear on the earth. Not the same as when computers arrived. Mankind is taking giant leaps into perdition and the wrath of God is going to be revealed in ways that will make Pharaoh's day seem light-hearted on His part.

What if He got angry and wanted to show it? So what! The clay is His creation!

"endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction..."

Still talking potter here, but this is not about Jeremiah or Moses or the Pharaoh incident any longer. Paul has used every example in this chapter to point to a greater truth: there are two classes of people in the world. Not just in Israel. God has made choices on a global scale. Those two categories are, as in the imagery of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy. It is a terrifying thought, or should be, to all the creation, and even to those of us who claim a relationship with Christ.

God's enduring is the focal point of this verse. God endured 1,500 years of evil before He destroyed the world with a flood. God got to the point where He was grieved with His creation, even wishing He had never made man (Genesis 6:6). But He decided to start over.

2,500 years later, God was grieved again. To the point of coming to the earth as a man Himself, and dying in the place of the evil ones.

He has endured 2,000 more years of rejection, pain, ridicule from those who ought to love Him. Now Paul tells us that all these "vessels", these

bodies containing life originally from God, have been prepared for destruction.

Difficult word. We see His compassion in allowing the world to continue, in allowing Himself to die. Then we see that from the beginning He knew exactly what would happen and allowed evil men to grow worse and worse so that eventually He would make His power known over them in one gigantic burst of judgment at the end of all things.

The wisdom escapes us. No one has figured it out. But there it is. Pure love. Pure Hatred. Pure grace. Pure judgment. Do not dare to raise your pitiful voice against His, lest you show yourself to be one of those destined for this fate.

The phrase “prepared for destruction” troubles us most in this verse. The potter at the wheel. Creates pots merely for the purpose of destroying them eventually? Or in the imagery of the prophet, does away with pots that have imperfections and starts over?

Perhaps John MacArthur can help a little here:

“Paul is speaking of ungodly and unrepentant human vessels, all of whom will feel the ultimate wrath of God, for which they have been prepared for destruction by their own rejection of Him... It is not that God makes men sinful but that He leaves them in their sin unless they repent of it and turn to His Son for deliverance.”

He suggests that Paul’s use of the passive here, “prepared”, allows for humanity to be the ones doing the preparing, not God. God cannot sin, nor can He tempt anyone to sin. That much we know. God did prepare a place for them, originally meant for the devil, Matthew 25:41. But that He prepared them for that place is not stated here. Men have had free will since their creation, and have consistently chosen against God. God will not fight them. They have decided to go to the prepared place.

That is MacArthur's take on the passage. I want to look a little more closely. First, the Greek word in 22 translated in modern versions as "prepared" is rightly styled as "fitted" in the KJV. The word means adjusted or repaired, made to fit, as in a frame. It seems to me Paul is saying that unregenerate man deserves destruction. They fit perfectly the outcome predicted for them. Through a lifetime of rejection they now go to their appropriate reward. God has waited a long time to bring humanity there, so that in the end He will receive glory from them.

But there is another people that God did specifically prepare, spoken of in the next verse. And a different word is used. KJV has it "prepared" this time, not "fitted." It means to fit up, or ordain, in advance.

Let's continue the thought in verse 23:

9:23

"... and that He might make known the riches of His glory..."

God wants to show His wrath, and make His power known, yes, but He also wants to bestow great riches on this other group. He endures wickedness and wicked people for thousands of years, knowing what the end will be. Wrath to the wicked, revelation to His people.

"The riches of His glory." Now there's a thought to keep us busy for a long time. At the end, God will show us the riches of His glory. Moses asked to see that glory and God had to hide Moses in a rock lest He be consumed by the glory of God. But one day we will receive more of those riches. More than Moses. Already we see the glory of what Jesus accomplished. We see Jesus outshining Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. We see the cross. The resurrected glory of Christ. The glory of Pentecost and His works down through the centuries.

But more, so much more, is in store for us. It has not yet entered into our minds how glorious that day will be when He returns in the glory of the

Father. He shall reign gloriously over the earth. His people will be given glorious new bodies, like His. The New Jerusalem will shine with the glory of God. The whole earth will be lightened with His glory, as Isaiah and John both saw. Jesus is the very Lord of glory. He has withheld much of it for these millennia, waiting for His judgment to fall on sin, and it will fall...

“...on the vessels of mercy...”

Vessels appropriate for destruction and judgment. Vessels fit for mercy. Because of His fitting His people, it is now appropriate that they see His glory and be with Him. They are not worthy in themselves, but are made worthy by mercy.

“which He had prepared beforehand for glory.”

To MacArthur's point. This verb is active and has a subject: God Himself did this preparing, not man. To the Greek: a totally different word, as I mentioned. A fashioning, a sculpting, a preparing beforehand. And immediately we are back in chapter 8:

He foreknew. He predestined [beforehand]. He called. He justified. He glorified. Prepared beforehand for glory. There it is again. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4. Do you see how all this fits together?

The thought is not finished yet. He goes on,

9:24

“Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

And finally, the question mark. A 3-verse-long question. Can we restate it, summarize it?

If God wanted to, couldn't he just have put up with sin long enough to finally make a distinction between His chosen people and the rest of the world? God has mercy on some, and some He just leaves alone to their own choices, which are always against Him. And that's God's business, and that's God's way. That's God.

Need even more proof? Get your Bible back out again, turn to Hosea, says Paul. Hosea 2:23:

9:25

"As He says also in Hosea, 'I will call them My people who were not My people, and her beloved who was not beloved.' "

What's he doing here? He's proved that God chooses whom He will. He's proved the sovereignty of God. But why? He's letting his own people there in Rome know that, even though his heart is heavily burdened for them, he must tell them the truth that God chooses based on His purposes ultimately, and not along the lines of race and ethnicity. He has just said that this God of the Hebrews has called people from the nations to join His family, and they will be included. He uses Hosea to prove it to them.

" 'And her beloved, who was not beloved.' "

Who are the beloved? The ones who God says are beloved. You mean we can't just be born into a good Jewish, or Christian home, and consider ourselves the beloved of God? Can we just make positive statements about ourselves, build up our self-esteem somehow and keep saying God loves me, and that will be enough?

Rest on nothing but the grace of God revealed in Christ. Go to Him, cry out to Him for forgiveness, for true salvation. Accept no substitutes. And if that is the desire of your heart, to be saved, to be His, to seek Him, that

alone is proof that you are one of His. It will show up in your life later, as fruit of the Spirit. But the first signal is that desire to know Him.

Paul goes on in Hosea, but in another chapter of that book, 1:10,

9:26

“ ‘And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” there shall they be called sons of the living God.’ ”

Devastating talk from the apostle. No wonder he is called the apostle to the Gentiles. What Jew, through the centuries, had not been taught that they themselves were the people of God, and that the rest of the nations, the “Goyim”, the Gentiles, were not? Oh there might be a Ruth or a Rahab, but no major exceptions. Israel was the chosen race. All other races, not so much.

Paul – but really Hosea hundreds of years earlier – now turns it all around. God has called some Jews, but He also looked over the world before its foundations and called to Himself a huge number of nationals from other people groups. In fact, we learn that it is every people, every nation, every tribe on earth that will have some representation in the final Kingdom.

And not just on-lookers. Sons of the living God. It doesn't get any better for a human being. And there it was, in the writings of the Jewish prophets, waiting to be discovered by a Jew in the first century whose initial goal was to wipe out every Christian from the face of the earth.

Grace.

But wait. There's more. Let Isaiah speak! Hosea tells us about Gentiles that are going to be saved, the not-beloved, the not-my-people, who suddenly by grace become beloved and the people of God. Isaiah addresses Israel:

9:27

“Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved.’ ”

That’s Isaiah 10:22. Except that in Isaiah, the prophet says the remnant “will return.” But in the verse preceding, verse 21, he clarifies that they will return to the Lord, not just to the land. Thus, they will be, as Paul says here, saved.

Paul has stated here nothing different than he did in 2:28-29. There are outward Jews, circumcised in their flesh. And there are Israelites aplenty in this category. And there are inward Jews, circumcised in the heart. The remnant, they are called here.

Or right here in this chapter, as we noted already, “They are not all Israel (remnant, saved, heart-circumcised) who are of Israel (natural, fleshly etc). Paul lines up perfectly with Isaiah.

Verse 28 here is roughly akin to the end of verse 22 and all of verse 23 in Isaiah 10:

9:28

“ ‘For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness’ ”

That is where Isaiah 10:22 ends. But in the original Hebrew, the translation, in the NKJV, goes, “The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.”

You may recall that Paul is using the Septuagint version, a Greek translation of the Hebrew text. Why the difference here? Well, this is not a fully satisfactory answer, but there is no contradiction in the texts. The Septuagint tells what is going to happen, the original Hebrew tells us why it is going to happen.

Judgment is coming, says Isaiah. Isaiah 9 describes some of what is coming. In Isaiah, Israel is alternately judged and blessed, condemned and comforted. Many of the prophets had this theme. God is angry, but ultimately He is going to bless His people. But Paul brings out the small print of Isaiah: it is to be only a remnant.

In this chapter of Isaiah we find that it is a remnant that escapes the judgment that must come on them as a nation. It is decreed. It will come. God's righteousness will be demonstrated by it, as Paul has said earlier when speaking of the vessels of wrath.

God will finish the work. What work? The work of salvation? The work of judgment? The work of restoration? We just know that eventually judgment will stop, righteousness will emerge, and that part of Israel that was known from the foundation of the world will with Hosea's not-my-people-made-sons-of-God Gentiles, inherit the Kingdom of God. The rest of verse 28 in Romans is equivalent to all of verse 23 in Isaiah, but once more with some variations:

“ ‘Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.’ ”

That's Septuagint. Isaiah's Hebrew is translated in NKJV, “For the Lord God of Hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land.”

Short work. Determined end. He's mentioned the work previously. Why is it significant that it will be “short” or “determined”? Daniel mentions a “determined consummation” which will be poured on the desolate, seemingly referring to Israel's final judgment during the Tribulation.

God has ordained a relatively short period of time when all His wrath will fall upon Israel and the planet. Most agree that this is three and one half years. Many of our brutal conflicts have lasted longer. Some have dragged on and on. But in a relatively short time, God has determined to finish His

punitive actions. Those who have accepted the judgment that was laid on Christ at the cross will not suffer the wrath of God. All others will.

But once the final shots begin to be fired, it won't be all that long before it is over. Especially quick will be the judgment on Satan himself at the return of Christ. Quick. Decisive. And all of this has been determined for millennia.

Short, but awful, Paul goes on to add, also using Isaiah. That prophet's book is filled with much comfort, especially in the latter portions. But it starts out with judgment. Paul is quoting from the first chapter, verse 9:

9:29

"And as Isaiah said before, 'Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed...'

Many want to read "Sabbath" here, but it is the Lord of *Sabaoth*. In the New Testament this word is used only here and in James 5:4. In the Old Testament, from which Paul is quoting it is used hundreds of times. *Sabaoth*. A mass of people organized into a military campaign. The armies of the Lord. Our God is the powerful God of the armies of Heaven and earth. All armies are organized to do His will, ultimately. Sovereign God, powerful Almighty God.

Unless that God had spared some of us, kept a remnant of us from being slaughtered,

" 'We would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.' "

Where is Sodom today? Where is Gomorrah, the twin city with Sodom? Absolutely gone, along with all its people. Where is Edom? Moab? Ammon? When God says "The End" to a nation, it is over. But God has never said that to Israel. And He never will. We're not talking about every

single Jewish person who has ever lived. We're talking about the ones God saw from the foundation of the world, a huge number of Israelites over-all, who will be saved because their faith matched the faith of their father Abraham.

The prophets have spoken, through the apostle. It is confirmed:

- Many Gentiles will be saved.
- A remnant of Israel will be saved.
- The rest will be judged.

These are the principles we hold onto as we proceed through this difficult passage. Israel is a special people that Paul grieved over. Though Israel has fallen, the Word of God took effect in certain Israelites. God chooses and calls to Himself whomsoever He wills, both of Jews and Gentiles.

Armed with that knowledge, we move on to Paul's conclusions:

9:30

"What shall we say then?"

There it is again. Paul's introduction to a summary statement and his invitation to his readers to respond to what he has said. If it's true that this special people called Israel have fallen to a great degree, and if it's true that a not-so-special people called the Gentiles is going to have access to the salvation that was once thought to be totally of Jewish ownership, what do we say? How do we make sense of all this? His answer forms the content of the final four verses of the chapter.

"That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness..."

Painful to hear. For the Jew it is painful because it doesn't seem fair. To the Gentile it is painful because it tells who we are. We are exposed to humanity as sinners. What man from his birth, among us, has tried every waking moment to please God, to be righteous? No, Paul, using the Psalms, knocked that theory out in his first chapters. None righteous, no not one. None that seeks after God. None that cares.

Except. Except some who have been touched by the Spirit of God, who have been wooed into the Kingdom through God's irresistible grace. They heard Christ say, Come to Me, and they came to Him. And he loved them, and justified them, made them righteous. They will follow Him all the way into Heaven's gates. They did not pursue righteousness. Righteousness pursued them, as one of the sheep out on the mountain alone, lost, helpless.

And when that righteousness found them and surrounded them and filled them they had to acknowledge that it was nothing they did, but everything God did that made it happen.

"even the righteousness of faith."

For by grace they were saved, through faith, and that not of themselves... it was the gift of God.

9:31

"But Israel..."

The following words must have caused more pain in the apostle's heart. When we speak of Israel's sin, let us speak of it with pain, not gloating. With mercy, not with judgment in our hearts. God's still working in these people, and we must remember how special they are.

"pursuing the law of righteousness..."

That's the old way, the way that God has said never was the fullness of His plan for His people. It is the way of the book. Read the book, try your best, offer the sacrifice for all the rest. But there is a new and living way. The Book of Moses has become the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, written in our hearts first, echoed in the words we read in our Book. The trying of man has become the power of God, who through His Spirit infuses His people. And the sacrifice is none other than the Lamb of God Himself, Jesus Christ.

Israel after the flesh knew none of this. Only a small group of them through the years had the insight to know that only faith would please God. Israel, as a nation, went the way of all the nations and

“has not attained to the law of righteousness.”

We now know that without faith it is impossible to please Him. We now know that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. We now know that a man is justified by faith, without the works of the law. We now know that the righteousness of God is in Christ Jesus only, that all men are condemned by their sins unless they appeal to that Higher Righteousness which God will impute to them as He did to their father Abraham.

Paul makes this point in verse 32:

9:32

“Why?”

How could it be that a nation to whom the law was given could not be saved by keeping the law? Didn't God want His people to keep the law? Yes he did and does, but He wants friendship and relationship first. Abraham was a friend of God. They walked and talked together. And when God spoke, Abraham listened and believed and obeyed. There was

no law to keep. There was nothing to earn or strive for. Just walk and talk, like Noah and Enoch.

“Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.”

In the Greek, “Because not by faith but as by works...” The “as” underscores the fact that they really believed works could save them. They lived as though works could save them. As if works could save them. They lived a lie.

Many today live that same lie. They have never tasted the grace of God but are living as though all the good things they have done are going to out-weigh all the bad, and usher them into the Kingdom of God. That’s a lie. Israel did not seek Heaven by faith, but worked as though their work would save them, and they lost out, and so will any other person on the planet. Don’t care how good you are or think you are, you get to Heaven because of how good Jesus is, and your personal faith in Him. Learn from Israel!

“For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.”

A new picture, but also one drawn from Isaiah. See Isaiah 28:16. There’s a rock in the road, and people are stumbling over it. What do you think of that image? How could it be possible that people would not see the rock, and so not trip over it? It would be possible if the person’s eyes were not on the road. If they were looking up instead of out. Or if they were blind. Or if someone was distracting them. Or if the rock was just around the bend, and they were running and didn’t have time to stop. Oh there are a lot of ways to stumble over a rock in the road.

Up until now Paul has used the general terms of righteousness and faith. When speaking of a rock in the road, he gets very specific. Many claim righteousness. They are self-righteous, adequately righteous, righteous

enough. They have faith. Everyone has faith. But faith in Whom? What kind of righteousness?

Now, Mr. Israelite, Mr. deceived Christian, now we must talk of a specific faith and a specific righteousness. His Name is Jesus.

Blind ones, proud ones, distracted ones, un-suspecting ones. They all fall down at the mention of that name, but that is the name we proclaim anyway.

9:33

“Behold I lay in Zion...”

This rock, or stone, is going to be laid in Zion. Not in any of the great Gentile capitals of the world. The stone will be Jewish. There is a special hill in the Middle East. In Israel. In Jerusalem. On that hill, Zion, the original city of David was built. The stone, or rock, is to be born in a suburb of Jerusalem. He will start his ministry in the Temple of Jerusalem. He will preach throughout that city. He will die outside that city. One day He will rule the world from that city.

Those among us who seem to hate the Jew, and downplay the call of God on that nation, forget that one main purpose of Israel was to bring forth a Messiah that would save them and save the world. That Messiah is Jesus. The Jew. From Israel. He is not a Gentile, though He loves Gentiles. He came first to the lost sheep of Israel. Paul himself followed that same pattern in his ministry, to the Jew first, and see how much of this letter to a Gentile church is given over to the Israelites then in Rome, and now scattered throughout the Gentile world.

What is the nature of this stone about to be laid?

Paul calls it first a “stumbling stone.” Isaiah, in the passage seemingly quoted, talks about a stone for a foundation in 28:16. But in 8:13-15 of that prophet, we read,

“[The Lord of hosts]... let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel... and many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.”

It would seem that Paul, who knew not chapter and verse in those days, is just quoting Isaiah, not a particular passage of Isaiah. Isaiah did say all of that, in two different places. Isaiah is in complete agreement with the apostle. This Jewish man Jesus is going to be the reason for many Jews to stumble and fall.

We see this acted out in the Gospels, don't we? Jesus, Son of God, but Son of David the Jew, anointed by the Holy Spirit of God, begins to work miracles, and teach the inner heart of the law of Moses. He gains favor among the people. Creates jealousy among the leadership. The Israeli government turns against Him and has been against Him ever since. Eventually the leaders are able to persuade the rest of the people to join in the crucifying mob that takes His life.

The stone was in the road. Jesus was there. The blind and distracted and proud did not see the stone, did not recognize Who was among them. As the Black spiritual goes, “We didn't know Who You was...”

When we don't see God in His glory, we treat Him pretty badly. Even now. The Jesus that lives in our church folks, even the born again. They don't seem like anything to us, and we overlook them and despise them, and relegate them to unimportant places in our lives. In families, Jesus is yelled at, ignored, bullied. Let's not stumble over the stone that is in our roadway, sir, or madam.

“And a rock of offense”

say Isaiah and Paul. It's one thing to stumble over a rock. But what does the "offense" part have to do with? How is Jesus a "rock of offense"? An offense is a scandal. An idea that one would avoid at all costs lest his reputation be smeared. What is the idea here? Is it the fact that this Jesus does not save Jews by their nationality or Gentiles by their sheer numbers, or anyone by any measure except the cross and the resurrection?

How offensive is that to a Jew! That someone could tell them that their heritage, their law, their forefathers, their special calling to bring the knowledge of one God, their writing of the Scriptures, nothing, can save them but a crucified Messiah?

How scandalous to a Gentile! All the wisdom and power and glory of the Gentile nations. Great Babylon, Rome, Russia, America. The greatest of the nations have no eternal saving power. Only Christ crucified and risen again.

God has laid this Rock in place for all time. The Rock will not move, but Israel will, and the Gentiles will. They will stumble and fall all around this Rock. Except for a few. The verse and the chapter concludes again what Paul has been trying to say all along:

"And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Several different readings here. NKJV Isaiah, going back to 28:16, says "Whoever believes will not act hastily."

Paul is quoted in the NASB as saying that He who believes in Him will not be disappointed. We better look at the Greek from which the KJV and many others find the correct word. Because the words do seem to carry different ideas.

The word is *kata-ischuno*. By definition, “to curse vehemently”. By usage, “to shame, put to utter confusion, to frustrate.” By extension, it has to do with one who is cursed whose hope told him he would be blessed. Hence, “disappointed.” Our disappointments don’t seem the same as our shame. But imagine a man appearing at the front of a church waiting for his bride, only to be told at the last minute that she has changed her mind. Here shame and disappointment meet.

Worse, imagine one who dies believing that to be Jewish is to be in right relationship with God. What disappointment, what shame awaits that one on the day when God judges all through Jesus Christ.

Paul joins with Isaiah to say that one who trusts in Christ for salvation will never know this extreme disappointment, this awful eternal shame.

But what of that Hebrew? Why does Paul use the Septuagint rendering? How can acting “hastily” in any way be reconciled to being “put to shame”? Some of you know already. How many times have you made a hasty decision and found it to lead the wrong direction? It seemed good at the time. You needed a car. This one was bright and shiny and the salesman could say nothing bad about it. Now, you knew it would stretch your budget to the max, even go over it. But in haste you bought it. Six months later the shame and disappointment as you see the tow truck in front of your house, taking away that hastiness with a hastiness of its own.

The Septuagint simply was paraphrasing here, and Paul used that paraphrase, for it tells the outcome of a hasty decision: disappointed shame.

The pathos that accompanies Paul’s entry into Romans 9 is still with him as he enters chapter 10. Chapter 9 looks at things from the perspective of the all-knowing, sovereign God Who chooses whom He wills. Chapter 10, still very much about Israel, puts the blame squarely on Israel’s shoulder. Here is the tension of this whole discussion. God chooses but man

chooses too. Every man can choose to refuse God and His ways. Every man can choose sin and rejection of holiness. Paul shows now just how Israel did this, and his heart is still aching, as ours should be.

10:1

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”

He is addressing the entire church, not just Israel, hence the third person. He has just told us that God Himself has said that only a remnant of Israel is going to be saved. But the desire of Paul’s heart, and his prayer to God, is, Lord, save my people Israel.

We understand a little more of the heart of God by watching Paul’s agony here. Was it not this same divisive agony that Paul mentions elsewhere when he says that God has not willed that any should perish? Yet, some will be called out and saved, by grace. We hear explanations to passages like this, and like John 3:16, that claim God’s love for the world, but we cannot ignore the others that teach election. Which is it?

Some have solved this dilemma by lining up all Scriptures that prove their point on one side, and explaining away all the ones that disagree with them. If they have a change of heart, they re-do their explanations to fit the other side. Better, I think, to live with the tension. Better to believe both. “Whosoever will, may come.” But, “Saved from the foundation of the world.” Both.

Like the “both” of the Trinity. God is one. God is three persons. Both.

Like the “both” of Jesus Himself: Son of God. Son of man.

Understand any of that? Great! Just admit it. You don’t. But don’t admit it too publicly, especially if you are a church leader, because your denomination, even if you don’t call it a denomination, will throw you

out. People want answers, definitions, rules. And when they think they have found the truth, they want to exclude all the others. That's where Protestant denominations came from. Calvin was right! Presbyterians and Reformed are right. Baptists are right. The rest of you are second-class. If you're saved at all.

This is not Christianity. It is unnecessarily divisive and shows nothing but pride. Get over it. You don't understand the deep mysteries of God.

Back to the text. God says, only a remnant of Israel will be saved. Paul says, God, save Israel. Why, Paul, why would you pray like this?

10:2

"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God..."

Here's why. He starts out on a positive note. A zeal for God. That's a good starting point for every Christian, but how often in history has that zeal been founded wrongly, or carried out wrongly?

Zeal is one of those words like "religion". It can mean something good or something bad. Zeal is a burning with enthusiasm. The fire of passion that won't let you go until a particular thing is accomplished.

In the Old Testament right away we think of Jehu. A king of Israel who seemed to be on fire for God. He was a commander of Israel's army, appointed by Elisha to be the next king. He right away got rid of Jezebel and all of Ahab's family. Cleaned the swamp, you might say. He singlehandedly destroyed Ba'al worship. He was so delightful to God with his zeal, that four generations later, a descendant of Jehu was still on the throne.

But in his later life we see that Jehu was zealous because of Jehu, not because of God. He enjoyed the power that zeal brought him, and the favor of the people. He fell away.

The Pharisees started out two hundred years before Jesus came. Their idea was that Israel had succumbed too much to Greek culture. A fire was lit in their hearts to separate from worldly ways and bring Israel back to the ways of God. A holiness movement. Fire. But the fire went out when the Pharisees began to turn inward and love the praises of men more than those of God. Illustrious costumes, pageantry, self-promotion brought that zeal to a halt.

Jesus had zeal. A zeal for God's house that eventually ate out His insides, as it were. He poured out His heart for the people of God, motivated by a true fire, a selfless love that only God can start.

Paul says that the Jews in general had a zeal for God. A passion. A burning desire. They wanted to please God, but they went about it the wrong way.

“but not according to knowledge.”

Misdirected ignorant zeal is a plague among us always. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons are a zealous bunch. And look at the zealous Muslims. They kill for zeal. They sincerely believe they are pleasing God, but they aren't. They lack knowledge. They have left the pathway of God's righteousness and are trying to create their own, as the next verse tells us about the Jews.

10:3

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness...”

He will now backtrack a little. At the end of chapter 9 he was talking about this very thing. Many Gentiles weren't looking for God's righteousness, but they got it. Israel was looking for it, but looking in the wrong place, so they lost it. And when true righteousness crossed their paths in the person of Jesus, they stumbled over that rock.

He's now going to go a little deeper with that idea. Though he has praised them for their zeal, he now accuses them of ignorance. Not according to knowledge in verse 2, equals ignorance in verse 3. They simply did not know the way of truth. They did not see that they were incapable of keeping the law. They did not see that God had provided a way in spite of their inability. With all the sacrifices and the pictures of their need for something to cover their sin, it didn't sink in that their sin could never be covered by the blood of animals.

God required mercy and not sacrifice. To obey, God said, is better than sacrifice. The message was there for the Jews. They didn't see it. Their own good works could not ever save them, even though they had the zeal of a Saul of Tarsus, who now writes to them.

"...and seeking to establish their own righteousness..."

Only a few people in the story we have of Old Testament characters, saw their own unworthiness before God. Think of Isaiah in the Temple, being given a heavenly vision and suddenly aware of his uncleanness, and the uncleanness of all those around him. Few are privileged even in this day, to see such a thing. I don't mean just the marvels of Heaven, but also the inherent evil of man. Until one sees how unholy he is, he will not call upon the name of the Lord, but will do what the Jews did, seek to establish his own righteousness. They set their own standard, usually low, then from time to time realize they don't even meet that, but brush it off with, "Oh well, no one's perfect."

Or they use Jesus as a model instead of a Saviour. They hold him up as the greatest Teacher who ever lived. They honor the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer. They may even honestly try to be as good a man as Jesus, and when failing at this impossible task, they once more exclaim, "He was the Son of God, perfect. But not me. I'm just doing my best to be like Him."

Only too late will these folks realize that their best will never be enough. If any man have not the Spirit of God, He is none of His. And that Spirit lives within, striving with the child of God toward the perfection that only He can bring about, and will bring about. The One Who started the work, will finish it. These people had the righteousness issue settled on day one. Christ is their righteousness, and creates actual righteousness one day at a time. Totally different from the man who sees Jesus from afar and wants very much to be like Him. A disciple. But not a friend. Not a brother. Always following, following, but nothing more.

“...have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

Somehow this righteousness of God is tied up with faith and a rock in Zion, but it's still not as clear as it will be when Paul is finished. All we know for sure, and we learned this in previous lessons, is that the law cannot save. Slavish obedience to the law, whether well-intentioned or not, is not enough. To be a true Jew, a man of the Spirit and not the flesh, to take full advantage of one's Jewishness, one's eyes must be opened to the truth about Christ and faith in Him, which Paul now explains.

10:4

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

The end of the law. For righteousness. To believers. Moses, through God's direction initiated a long series of practices, sacrifices, commandments. Every one of them pointed to Jesus Christ who would appear at the end of history and fulfill them. In that sense Jesus is the end of the law. The last manifestation of the righteousness of God that God was trying to communicate for those hundreds of years. The culmination. The end.

The Jews thought that the law itself was the end of everything. To this day, many erstwhile zealous Jews desire to reestablish Temple worship, with all its particulars. They want to have a revival of Moses. They do not

comprehend that the law ended in Christ. They do not understand that the law was nailed to the cross of Christ. That the law is now to be written in the heart of the believers in Christ.

Only one last step, was Jesus. But by taking that step, God finished His program and plan of righteousness. The law was a schoolmaster, a great teacher, but the lesson is Christ. How tragic to go to school all those years, and never graduate. The diploma is Christ. How vain to go to a trade school and learn the trade and never be certified. The certification is Christ.

Christ, the sin offering. Christ the peace offering. Christ the tabernacle. Christ the lampstand. Christ the manna and the showbread. Christ the cleansing laver. Everything the Jew loves culminates, ends, in Christ. Believe in Christ, and Jews become completed Jews. Without Him, they flunk school.

That's why Paul was sad. His fellow Jews had taken the course but failed the test. They loved all things Jewish except the One Jew Who made sense of it all. Him they crucified.

10:5

“For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law...”

Paul says, You want Moses? I'll give you Moses. Don't hide behind Moses. Moses said exactly what I am trying to say. He talked about two ways to try to be saved. You can try to be saved by keeping the law, or you can be saved by believing. Let me quote Moses here: First in Leviticus 18:5, he spells out how to be saved by the law:

“ ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ ”

What things? The context is a warning to the Israelites. You lived in Egypt. They did things I do not like. Don't live as the Egyptians. Soon you will

enter Canaan. You will see and hear about the way they live. Don't follow them either. Instead, observe My judgments, keep My ordinances, and my statutes. Do everything I tell you. If you do, you will live. And the opposite is true. Now, here are some more rules I want you to keep. And then follows the rest of Leviticus.

Plan of salvation A, from the lips of Moses via Paul: Do, and live. It's the plan most religious people in the world are under. Even the non-religious are forced to admit that they live by a set of rules, though of their own making. Their idea of "living" is very short, but they make the most of their threescore and ten by staying healthy, enjoying life, following their own dreams and ideas. Do, and live, is the model for the world's way to happiness and/or God.

But there is another way. Also spoken of by the lawgiver Moses. It's in Deuteronomy 30, verses 12 to 14.

Paul introduces it in the next verse:

10:6

"But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way..."

Two kinds of righteousness. The first one we saw in verse 5 and Leviticus. That's the righteousness produced by a perfectly sinless life. Never any sin. You obey all. You do, and you live. But the righteousness of faith is a different message, and here is how Moses communicated that message: (Deuteronomy 30:12-14.)

"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' "...

Hidden in the recesses of Moses' heart by the Spirit, and in the heart of the God Who gave the ten commandments and the hundreds of other statutes and judgments, was one desire. It's in the end of verse 10 of that

thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy: turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Moses then explains himself: (11-14) If you turn to God with all your heart, you will find that my law is in there. It's not a mystery. It's not in the height of heaven. It's not in the depth of the ocean. It's near you. It's in your heart. If you will just allow God into your heart by faith, you'll know that God's ways are true, and you will want to obey Him.

That seems to connect to Jesus' response to the Pharisees who asked Him which of the commandments is number one. He said, Love God with all your heart. The heart is the issue. Is the heart right with God? Jews whose hearts were right with God kept the law out of that pure heart. Jews whose hearts did not care about God may have kept the law but there was no faith and love added to it, and it was profitless.

The hardened heart is always looking for more. A hardened heart can read the Bible and say, More, Lord! I want more. Surely there is a revelation in heaven somewhere for me? Tell me some secret, some vision, some "word" from heaven. The testimony of Jesus and the apostles, is not enough. Unfortunately, many of these people do get a revelation from the heavenlies, but not from God's habitation.

Paul adds an explanation that may or may not have been in Moses' original intent. But Paul is giving us the Spirit's interpretation of Moses. He adds to Deuteronomy a commentary,

"(that is, to bring Christ down [from above])"

Those italicized English words, *from above*, are not in the Greek. Who will go up and bring Christ down? Christ, come down and tell me something. Christ, come down and make it personal for me. Christ, they say you died and rose again, but I want to hear it from you personally. Christ, this is too simple a message. Show me what you really want, who you really are, what you really did. Talk to me.

Faith does not speak that way. Doubt speaks that way. Pride speaks that way. Disobedience and hardness speak that way. Paul goes on with Moses, telling us another way faith does not speak:

10:7

“or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)’ ”

Some would say that this “abyss” is none other than Hades, the abode of the dead. Indeed, the Greek word matches that assumption. It is used in Revelation to refer to the bottomless pit. Nevertheless, the parallel passage in Deuteronomy speaks of the sea, that is, the depths of the ocean.

The point is that one need not go, if it were possible, to the reach of space or to the bottom of the world, to get a revelation from Heaven. The revelation is much closer than that. No need to ascend into Heaven to ask Christ to come down and give you a special message. No need to search the pit to see if Christ is there and will now ascend from the grave on your behalf. He already did that. The record is clear. Christ is already brought up from the dead. The announcement has been made. Death is defeated, the law is defeated. Sin is defeated. The good news is available without searching heaven and earth for it.

This latter search, into the place of the dead, is especially revealing of the unbelief of a hardened heart. The rich man who died and went to that awful place, pleaded with Abraham to send someone back from the grave to warn his family about not coming to where he was. Abraham said no to this request, and stated that even if one were raised from the dead, people would not believe. So it has been. Jesus was raised from the dead. But people still seek the living among the graves. Still hope for some future miracle that will cause a dead man to come to earth and bring them salvation.

This hope, I believe, will intensify in the latter days. I believe that Revelation and Daniel teach that one who has already lived on this earth will return as the supposed savior of all. The great masses of earth's population will buy his story and listen to his plan of salvation.

Until then, there is a much simpler way, the only way, to get to Heaven, to be righteous before God. We have learned that it is not the law. Moses and Paul give us the plain easy truth:

10:8

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.’ ”

Note again that it is Moses who said this. Did he know what he was saying? What was he thinking when he said it? The answer to that question cannot be given any more than that which passed through the lips of David when he shouted out, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” And later in that same chapter, “they pierced my hands and feet.” Was David forsaken? Were David's hands and feet pierced, as in Roman crucifixion? What were these Old Testament men thinking as God's Words flowed through their mouths?

We don't know. But we know they spoke truth. And Paul, through the Spirit, has captured that truth for us. Here's what Moses meant, says Paul in parentheses:

“(that is, the word of faith, which we preach)”

If the passage stops here, which it most assuredly does not, you give rise to a philosophical religion that the world loves to capitalize on, literally profit from. You in fact introduce the “word of faith” movement, a crass prosperity-based message that honors faith above the object of our faith,

that uses faith, the human ability to believe just about anything if it tries real hard, to produce financial and medical miracles.

All men have the capacity to believe. And to believe anything that is put before them if it sounds credible. Hitler had a nation believing that Jews were animals and needed to be exterminated. The profiteers of early America and Western Europe and Africa, black men and white, convinced this nation at one time that buying and selling and using Blacks for the building up of a society materially, was a good thing, a necessary thing. Today, huge portions of our nation have been convinced that the child living inside the womb, as Jesus and John the Baptist – filled with the Holy Spirit in their mother's wombs – is nothing more than a conglomeration of cells that can be tossed out or sold for a profit and gotten rid of as an inconvenience.

People will believe most anything. That is faith, human faith. That is not the faith this passage is talking about, the power of human faith...

Moses and Paul are talking about a supernatural God-placed faith that originates with the Word of God, a Word from the Scriptures, from the testimony the Holy Spirit has given us. They are saying what Ephesians 2:8 says. You are saved by grace through faith, yes, but that faith to be saved is not from you, it is from God, a gift. No need to fly to heaven or sink to hell to look around for the way of salvation. It is in your very mouth, rising up from your heart. And Paul now goes on to be even more specific about what is in the heart and mouth of every truly saved person.

And by the way, this passage is about salvation. The word of faith which Paul preached led to salvation. Not healing. Not financial prosperity. Not success in this world. Salvation.

Here is the word which faith produces and which saves you:

10:9

“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus.”

He gives the last part first. He'll reverse the order in the next verse, but here he is following Moses' order. Mouth, heart. For those who witness a person being saved, they see first the product of the mouth. Something has been going on in the heart, but we don't know about it until it comes out of the mouth.

Problem here is that some do try to manufacture a confession by speaking it out, listening to it, and then believing it is in the heart. A self-convincing salvation. If I say it enough it will become a part of me. Some have been making confessions like these since childhood and are convinced they are saved because of it. Someone told them to speak it out, so they spoke it out.

But Paul adds quickly,

“and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead...”

If what you say with your mouth does not originate from your heart, your salvation is needing something. Let the heart speak in its fullness. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. If your heart is filled with sin and self, and you simply say a bunch of words to get in harmony with a bunch of people, what do you have? A bunch of people. For a while. Eventually you will be offended and separated, and all will be made aware that your confession started in your head, not your heart.

Paul adds another test for the one who questions his salvation. This faith is even more specific than just “believing in Jesus.” Something deep in the heart says to you, when you hear it preached, or read the words of Scripture: Yes, He not only *is*, He is the risen Savior. He died on that cross, but in a short time God raised Him from the dead.

This is not something you can try to do. God through the Holy Spirit freely gives you this faith. People don't rise from the dead. But you just know it's

true and you act on it. You talk about it. No one has to tell you what to say or how to say it. "You ask me how I know He lives," says the old song, "He lives within my heart." You have heard the testimony and enabled by grace, you believe it.

A person possessing this faith and this confession, which are two parts of the same event,

"will be saved."

Here and in verse 13, it seems that the culmination of our salvation is in future tense. It certainly begins in the moment of faith, but will end in you being safe from eternal death, safe from Sin and its consequences and its guilt.

As Protestants we read passages about being "saved" and "salvation" with what seems to be a ready understanding of the terms. Those on the outside don't know what we mean. I wonder how many on the inside know the difference between "saved" and "unsaved." "Salvation" vs "damnation." "Savior" vs "Judge."

Let's take a quick look at how Paul uses the word "saved" and "salvation" in Romans. We've skipped over many of these references, perhaps due to over-familiarity. Romans 1:16 leads the way. The Gospel is the power of God to salvation. By faith in God's righteousness. For Jews and Gentiles, he tells us from the very beginning!

5:9 talks of a wrath that is coming, from which we will be saved. Because of faith in Jesus' blood. Future tense.

8:24 puts salvation in our past and future. We "were saved" but in the hope of the ultimate redemption of our body. Salvation begins in Jesus and never ends.

9:27 speaks of the remnant of Jews who will be saved eventually.

And then in our current chapter.

Paul wants Israel to be saved. Believe in this Jesus and you will be saved, along with Israel's remnant. With the heart and the mouth come salvation. Anyone who calls on Jesus will be saved. So we need to send more preachers to preach more Gospel to more people.

Salvation is a big matter to Paul. Deliverance from the sin he discusses in so many chapters. Rescue from the wrath coming to punish mankind's sin. Saved is not a feeling, though feelings will come. Saved is not a theological term for the scholars to debate. It is a moment of Truth when Christ the Saviour enters the heart and soul of a human being and begins in him a work that is eternal in nature. Let us be careful about throwing this word around carelessly.

10:10

"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Now the order is reversed to its logical flow. It starts in the heart, surrounds and penetrates the mind, and comes out the mouth-gate. Believes what? The word of faith which the apostles preached. The message itself he spells out later. Again, this is not about the modern take on these verses. This is not about "positive confession." We did not advance in our thinking Scripturally when Kenyon and Copeland and Hagin burst on the scene. We went far afield, in fact.

Confession does not produce faith. First there is the word. Something from God to believe. Then a man believes it by grace. Then a man confesses it, by that same grace. I am not confessing my new airplane until I finally see it before me, and take my first flight in it. I am not confessing a new leg, to replace the one I lost in surgery, until I walk on it. I am creating nothing. God the Creator has created a plan for my

salvation. Christ went to the cross, dies, and rose again. For my justification. For my sanctification. For my eternal life. That is the message I receive and pass on through my mouth. And when I as a witness to that resurrected life pass on what is in me, that word brings others to believe and confess.

We are talking about an eternal message that brings eternal life that was deposited in the church two millenia ago. The Gospel. The Good news. And we are not ashamed of it because God Himself has placed it inside of us.

What you see paraded before you on Christian television and elsewhere is often contrived and man-made. Oh it may produce some good things, humanly speaking, but it will not necessarily produce the eternal life of Jesus dealt with in Romans.

The next verses make it painfully clear to the false teachers that it is the Gospel and not health and wealth that are being discussed in Romans 10. Paul appeals now to Isaiah again:

10:11

“For the Scripture says,”

Paul uses no authority but what God has already said and what God is speaking to him personally as an apostle. No others but prophets and apostles of Jesus can speak authoritatively in our lives. Be sure that those voices you hear inside line up with the Voice of God already revealed to a prophet or an apostle. The Scripture he refers to is Isaiah 28:16, which he has already quoted in the last verse of the last chapter, 9:33.

“ ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ ”

We had a full discussion of that when we covered 9:33, but let me insert it here as a review and a reminder regarding the little bit of confusion about the translation of this verse from Isaiah.

Several different readings here. Your NKJV Isaiah, going back to 28:16, says "Whoever believes will not act hastily."

Paul is quoted in the NASB as saying that He who believes in Him will not be disappointed. We better look at the Greek from which the KJV and many others find the correct word. Because the words do seem to carry different ideas.

The word is kata-ischuno. By definition, "to curse vehemently". By usage, "to shame, put to utter confusion, to frustrate." By extension, it has to do with one who is cursed whose hope told him he would be blessed. Hence, "disappointed." Our disappointments don't seem the same as our shame. But imagine a man appearing at the front of a church ailing for his bride, only to be told at the last minute that she has changed her mind. Here shame and disappointment meet.

Worse, imagine one who dies believing that to be Jewish is to be in right relationship with God. What disappointment, what shame awaits that one on the day when God judges all through Jesus Christ.

Paul joins with Isaiah to say that one who trusts in Christ for salvation will never know this extreme disappointment, this awful eternal shame.

But what of that Hebrew? Why does Paul use the Septuagint rendering? How can acting "hastily" in any way be reconciled to being "put to shame"? Some of you know already. How many times have you made a hasty decision and found it to lead the wrong direction. It seemed good at the time. You needed a car. This one was bright and shiny and the salesman could say nothing bad about it. It would stretch your budget to the max, even go over it. But in haste you bought it. Six months later the

shame and disappointment as you see the tow truck in front of your house, taking away that hastiness with a hastiness of its own.

The Septuagint simply paraphrased here, and Paul used that paraphrase, for it tells the outcome of a hasty decision: disappointed shame.

Looking on to verse 12, it would seem to me that the main word of verse 11 is “whoever”, whereas that same text emphasizes the “shame” aspect in 9:33. Stay on the rock, and you will never be put to shame. Who, Paul? Whoever stays on that rock by faith will be eternally kept from shame. Same verse, different emphasis. You see how he follows up in verse 12,

10:12

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek...”

Another wincing in pain if you happen to be Jewish, hearing Paul’s letter read for the first time. Let it sink in. We are the chosen people. Called out of Chaldea. Called out of Egypt. Called to Mt. Sinai and given the Law. Called into Canaan. Producer of the Scriptures. Producer of the great kings and prophets and mighty men of God. Gentile nations falling to us right and left. Now we must hear that when all is said and done, there is no distinction between us and the “Greeks”?

Greeks is a first-century term that included all the nations, since the Greek culture and language had taken over the world, even though it was a world dominated by the Roman military.

Really? Serious here? No distinction? Not even a little? How can this be? Answer is in the rest of the verse:

“for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.”

One God implies one plan of salvation. There is not a Jewish plan and a Gentile plan. Call on Him from the heart, you’re in. He sits in heaven

waiting to show Himself mighty and loving and accepting to anyone who calls.

“Rich”? Yes, as in Ephesians 1:7 that talks of the “riches” of His grace. Only the rich can give. If God were poor, He could not give an entire planet everything it needs and abundantly more. But our Benefactor made the planet and everything in it. He’s rich. Call on Him and you will see His own riches poured out on you. Come into Christ and you will be a part of a worldwide fellowship. That is richness in and of itself. You will be given a new life. Eternal life. Forgiveness of sin. Power to please God. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Scriptures. You will be rich.

Notice the text does not say here that the Lord gives richly, though this is true. It says He is rich. Jesus does not just give us wisdom. He is wisdom. Strength. He is strength. Riches. He is richness. Abundance. He came to give us life and life more abundant. When He turns toward you, His very shining presence covers you with super-abundance and you have all you could ever need.

Proof? Paul is always ready with a text. From the Jewish Scriptures He proves that the Jews are not the only ones in God’s heart. Look at Joel 2:32, quoted in the next verse:

10:13

“For, ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”

Joel is a fascinating prophecy. It starts out with a local storm of locusts devouring everything in sight, a precursor to a similar group of creatures in the book of Revelation. Though one is tempted to keep it all local, the shift to the end times is unavoidable. And those end times are mentioned by Peter, as he quotes from this same passage on the Day of Pentecost. First, he mentions, in 2:28, an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That’s history. That was the first of the last days. We are still in those last times of history.

The last days will conclude with a show of natural wonders, including a darkened sun, pillars of smoke, a blood-red moon. And all during that time, says Joel, and now Paul, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Joel mentions the Jewish remnant. But Paul boldly clings to the “whoever” of Joel. The salvation that comes first to Jerusalem will be a universal salvation of all who call on His name. Great deliverance. Great salvation. Simply by calling on His name. Paul next describes how that salvation comes to the human heart all the way from the Throne of heaven, and from this Jerusalem where it started. A Fascinating journey.

10:14

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?”

Calling is a very specific activity. You are not just calling into empty space out of desperation. You are calling on someone you have heard about and believed in. Be careful about songs and prayers that don’t go to specific persons. There are quite a number of personages that can answer if no name is attached. I do not say we are not protected, but I would caution you. We are not believers in a blind force, simply some supernatural power. We call on One very specific Person who is revealed to us by the preached word. He spells this out next:

“And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”

Paul makes a case here that there is one way to hear the truth. It is through the preached Word. Many today are claiming salvation by dreams. They say that a Man appears to them in shining White, in a dream, and through His message they come to God. We never want to limit God’s operations, but we also do not want to be gullible.

If an enemy of our faith wanted to prove to us that he was really one of us now, it would be easy for him to just say, God showed me in a dream...

How many Christians will fall for the "God told me" bunch? Did God really tell them? I won't say I know or don't know, but I do know that Paul's words here must be taken at face value. You can't believe fully in Jesus unless you have heard a specific message about him. Then he goes on to tell us who that messenger must be:

"And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

The message of salvation comes through men who preach it with words. Visions may bring you to the preacher. Dreams may bring you to the preacher. Miracles may bring you to the preacher. But in my opinion, one is not saved until the preacher preaches that message, and the hearer believes that message, and therefore the Holy Spirit can deal with that man's heart, cleanse him, bring him to repentance and true faith.

Consider Cornelius. First Gentile convert. A model for us who are not Jews, as to how Christ is to be received. In Cornelius' story, a dream came first. I do not say that a dream must come first, but something must motivate you to get to the preacher, the man who has the message to give you about Jesus. Peter was the man of the hour in Cornelius' life. See how God could have saved Cornelius by the dream? God could have outlined for him the whole plan of salvation and saved Peter a trip. But that is not how He works in our day. The dream or the vision or the miracle may come, but be aware that no man is saved without the preached word being applied to his heart.

So whoever calls on the name of the Lord after the message of salvation in Jesus Christ has come to Him, will be saved. What makes him call? The message includes the awareness of sin. The condemnation that sin has brought on us all. The message then includes repentance from that sin, asking God to forgive of sin. God forgive me, I am lost! This calling to God

is a deep-seated awareness that without God I am lost forever. That's why we call, and that is when God saves and not before.

A dream does not accomplish that. A miracle makes one aware that God is calling. But it is the preacher that makes man aware that he has some calling to do also.

By the way, "Preacher" is not an official church officer. Nowhere are qualifications given for a "preacher". Elders (which includes pastors and bishops, interchangeable terms), deacons, yes, but preacher, no. Preacher is not one of the first century miracle men either, as apostle and prophet. Preacher is not even an evangelist, necessarily, though the two ideas overlap.

Quite often the pastor of a local church is called the "preacher." Because he preaches, or more likely, teaches God's Word. Teaching of God's Word is not the same as preaching as in this context.

The preacher, or *kerousontos*, the one preaching, was the town crier of Paul's day. Like many words we have adopted in the Christian faith, it is not a specifically religious word. It speaks of one who shouts out the news with authority. In our case, it is the Good News that is being given out. Paul was a *kerousontos* in town after town, crying out first in the synagogue, then in the street or wherever he could get a hearing, the news about a crucified Savior. All the apostles were preachers. But not all preachers are apostles or officials at all. Mary Magdalene was a preacher, announcing the risen Lord to the men in hiding.

Evangelists Billy Graham and Dwight Moody were preachers, but so were the ones who brought them to Christ. Sunday School teachers, Christians on the job or at the marketplace or at the train station giving out tracts telling of Jesus, all in a measure are heralds, heavenly criers.

It is through heralding that God has decided to bring others to Jesus. People will not hear unless the message is passed on by word of mouth or

written word. But word, for sure. Radio programs, television preaching, messages of Christ wadded up and placed inside a helium balloon and sent over into North Korea. All preachers. We have invented many ways to get the Word out, but make no mistake that without these men-sent words, no one goes to heaven.

Even the thief on the cross came in by way of a written word from Pilate, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" and a personal word from Jesus who preached His last sermon by death on the cross and told this dying man, Today you will be with Me in Paradise.

So you must hear from a preacher. But wait, there's more: The chain of events does not end here, in Paul's thinking. One more thing has to happen before any of this can take place. A third call, if you will, following the call of God, but before the man calls on God: the call of the preacher. How did the preacher show up to begin with?

10:15

"And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

In the context here, it does not seem to me that this idea is exclusively about the sending out of missionaries into all the world. Certainly this is included, but as we just saw, there are many who have gone out, not sent by offerings and ordinations. They go out with no other commission than the great commission. Jesus told His last followers to go into all the world. It is clear that those few men did not physically complete that task, but they passed on the work to the following generations, and it has come down to us.

Everyone who tells another soul about the risen Savior is doing so because Jesus sent him into his part of the world. No one preaches the true Gospel unless he is sent, and we are all sent, in that sense.

Of course it is a visibly exciting event when a man or woman or couple decide to take this message where it has never been before. To hazard life and limb in a culture totally different from home. To be literally and financially sent by a home church or mission board. But sending goes on at many levels.

God has everything in order. Here is the order that Paul has spelled out:

Sending a saved human to announce God's Kingdom to a fellow human, that human hears and believes and calls and is saved. That's the system. That's how the Kingdom works. It is not complicated or expensive, though it may cost one his life to be engaged in this simple task. But sound systems and lighting and buildings and huge outlays of cash and are not the means of God propagating His announcement. Just one human telling another human is the way.

Once more, Paul backs up his ideas with Scripture. The following quote is from Isaiah (Paul seemed to love this prophet!) 52:7.

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things."

If you're comparing notes with Isaiah, you see right away that "upon the mountains" is missing. Paul is not talking about only those who go to the uttermost bounds of earth, but just about those who go.

The context of Isaiah is different and yet the same. Isaiah addresses Israel. He speaks of a messenger who is announcing the Kingdom of God that shall surely come to this earth when Jesus comes. He talks of the "bringing back" of Zion, Israel's ultimate repentance and acceptance by God, God's vengeance upon the nations.

That's different. But look how it dovetails with our own truth. The Gospel, or good news that is being proclaimed in both passages is able to be proclaimed because of the Mighty One of Israel. He has made it all

possible. Isaiah will within a few verses go into the awful story of the rejected Messiah. The beginning of Isaiah 53 is a tragic telling of the Gospel. And at the end of that sour note, at the end of Isaiah 53, back to the note of victory.

The Gospel of Peace is the Gospel secured by the prince of Peace. Jesus has made peace between God and man through His death and resurrection. The Gospel of “good things” is the news about the rejected but risen Christ, the eternal Kingdom, restored Israel. It’s all one package in Paul’s thinking.

Those languishing in sin and defeat are made to rejoice when they look and see feet approaching them and hands reaching out to them. What a beautiful sight the prisoners in Hitler’s death camps beheld, when the booted feet of American soldiers came trampling through their land. Such good news. Freedom!

Our world is in bad shape and is going to get much worse. Thank God that He has boots on the ground all over this earth, announcing to individuals the Kingdom of God that can be set up in the heart now, and will be set up over the entire world then. We have good news. Like the Gaither song,

“I’m slippin’ on my dancin’ shoes, ‘cause I’ve got good, good news!”

Good news. Gospel. Glad tidings. Paul is exuberant here, but there’s a problem. Look at verse 16.

10:16

“But they have not all obeyed the Gospel...”

Downer. Not everyone is on board with our good news. The “they” of this passage has to be Israel, but it is not stretching the text at all to include everyone who has rejected the Gospel.

The word that Paul uses for “obeyed” means to listen to, to attend to. There is a close connection between hearing and obeying. The idea is that even though the Jews heard with their ears, they didn’t really hear, and therefore did not give heed to, or “obey” the good news.

The idea of hearing, believing, and obeying, is found in other New Testament texts. Acts 6:7 talks of many Jewish priests becoming obedient to the faith. That’s not a life of works, or some entrance rite. That’s believing. They heard, they responded in faith. Paul has already mentioned obedience to the faith in his opening to this letter, 1:5. “Obeying the truth” is in 2:8. 6:17 speaks of a heart-felt obedience to the truth. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 speaks of those who do not obey the gospel, the very ones Isaiah saw. Their fate is serious.

The news we hear on TV does not need a response on our part. We listen, we may react, but we go on with our life. God’s news is not like that. The entire context of the chapter is how God’s righteousness is accessed. It is accessed by God’s grace depositing God’s faith in our hearts. That faith rises up and becomes a confession of truth out of our mouth, and we are saved.

The faith came to us in the form of a word or message from God. That message is the good news that Jesus died in our place and that we are now invited to accept what Jesus did and live forever. So it is a combination of information, or news, coming from Heaven, and response from our heart. That’s where obedience and Gospel meet. And obviously, many did not hear and obey. Even Isaiah himself laments that the people of his day were not believing what he had to say:

“For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ ”

That’s Isaiah 53:1, just after the “beautiful feet” passage, just before the “suffering servant” passage. Isaiah is saddened. Messengers are coming with news, but people aren’t believing the news. “News” is one translation possibility for the Hebrew that gives us “report.”

Ever heard a news report and said, That's fake! That's not true. All well and good in these days. There's plenty of false news on both sides of the political spectrum. People tell false news because their personal opinion doesn't agree with the true news. People tell false news to get attention, to be the first to announce something that is so spectacular. People tell false news when they are bribed or coerced by high government powers.

But God's news is pure. It's true. It's motivated by love. God cannot lie. Isaiah knew this. He had a personal encounter with Israel's God, and had been purged of his sins. He knew fake news from holy news. And he proclaimed it. And people didn't buy it. Too busy. Too deceived. Too blinded.

Before Paul moves on, he summarizes what he has said so far, to be sure people haven't lost his train of thought:

10:17

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

That's verses 8, 9, 14. The word is near you, the word which we and others preach. Confess this Jesus that you believe in, having heard it from God. God will send that word to you via a preacher. Just believe what the preacher tells you and you'll be saved. All of this is in summary.

Now, back to the main trail. Did the people of earth not hear the preached word? Didn't they know the truth? What happened? Though he is speaking largely in this passage about Israel, notice here that he goes beyond the Jewish nation to all nations, when he quotes David's 19th Psalm.

10:18

"But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed."

No question. We suddenly are back in chapter 1, where Paul boldly proclaims that even the natural revelation that God gives, makes men without excuse. You know Psalm 19. Paul has used the Septuagint here, and he takes off that familiar first part, "The heavens declare the glory of God..." He starts in 19:4,

" 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.' "

David is talking about the elements of creation here. Mountains and skies and day and night testify to the fact of a great Spirit. A great God over all. A great Creator. Only the fool says that all of this came here by chance. That makes every man responsible to know this Creator. Men are without excuse. The creation may not have the specific message that those of the beautiful feet carry, but there is enough there to get man's attention.

Man in general has heard. The report has gone out. The news is clear. And who has believed all of this announcing by God? Few.

What about Israel itself? As he did earlier in the book, Paul will bring Gentile and Jew to the same accountability before the same God.

10:19

"But I say, did Israel not know?"

Not know what? Let's not lose Paul's theme here, from the beginning verses.

Israel was trying to save itself by keeping the law. They were ignorant of God's righteousness. Paul goes on in this chapter to establish that that righteousness could have been obtained by simple faith. Even Moses had told them that the word of faith was inside them, if they could just hear it. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord , says Joel, will be saved.

Then Isaiah spoke of messengers of God who proclaim good news about a reconciliation between God and man. Didn't Israel, that produced Moses, and Joel, and Isaiah, know about this salvation?

It seems to me that modern translations may have taken some liberty with the Greek, by suggesting that Paul's question reads, "Surely they did not know, did they?" Implying total ignorance of the facts being announced by God. But the Greek of the Textus Receptus (KJV, NKJV) seems clear. "Did not know Israel?"

Implied answer: They did know. How could they not know, the facts? But there are two ways to know something. Jesus expressed that idea when he told the Pharisees of his day and unbelieving Jews and Gentiles of all time: "Hearing, you will hear [the truth] and not understand [it]."

They knew. They had heard the truth. But they didn't know. In fact, they were to remain so ignorant of all God was doing around them, that one day there would arise around them another people, that had no former connection to the commonwealth of Israel, no personal visitation on a flaming mountain, no miracle escape from Egypt, no miracle building of a land that was not their own. And this people group, the Gentiles, would obtain salvation before some of them. Moses' words are offered as proof:

"First Moses says, 'I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.' "

That's Deuteronomy 32:21. See how this apostle keeps referring to the Jewish Scriptures when dealing with his people. Perhaps we should be using what we call the Old Testament more when we share our faith with the Jews of our day.

The Moses quote is compelling. All of that verse 21 says, "They [Israel] have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols...."

So, "I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation."

A non-existent nation and a foolish nation will arise and come into the Kingdom before the Jews who reject God's plan. This sounds like the complete setting aside of Israel forever, to be replaced by the Gentile church with a few Jews. I think that is jumping to conclusions that Paul is not making. If a woman provokes a man to jealousy by dating someone else for a while, that does not prove her lack of desire for the first guy. In fact it shows her deep hope that guy number one will return. Not a perfect analogy, but chapter 11 will confirm something like that. God has an everlasting covenant with an entity called Israel.

So who or what is this "non-existent" nation? Moses, through the Spirit of God sees into the future of nations, and sees many that will exist in the future that did not exist then. Though God's attention seems to be focused on one tiny people group of the Middle East, Moses says there are coming nations that do not exist now, that I will call to myself.

Consider only America if you need proof of this. How many Gentiles out of this one land of ours will be around the Throne one day praising God with the saved part of the House of Israel?

As to the "foolish" nation, what could be more foolish than denying the existence of the one true God and worshiping idols? Such were the nations of Moses day and in large part, our own day. But these "foolish" nations will hear a voice in their hearts, when the Word of God is preached to them, and they will put aside their foolishness, and go after the God of Israel, that Israel itself put aside for paganism!

Israel wants to serve gods that are not gods? I will bless nations that are not nations.

Israel wants to play the fool with the pagan deities? I will play the Savior to the worshipers of those pagan gods.

Our God is a jealous God, is He not? Does He not have a right to be? You want to complain about this God of the Bible and start looking around for something else? You'll find it. Let us know how that works out for you. It didn't work out too well for Israel.

Paul now quotes Isaiah with an even more biting word from the Hebrew writings:

10:20

“But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’ ”

Isaiah 65:1. Isaiah is passionately calling Israel out. He reminds them that there are people in other nations far less privileged than Israel who by grace are finding the Lord. Nations whose names had nothing to do with God, peoples proud of their own godless heritage, yet including a remnant of individuals who call on the name of the Lord.

It's one thing for God to make Himself known to other nations, as in the Moses quote. It's another thing for those people actually to be accepting and being accepted. Found of God! God manifesting Himself to people other than Jews.

He compares all of that (in Isaiah 65:2) to His own people, to whom He stretches out His hands all day long only to be spurned and rejected.

10:21

“But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’ ”

Paul confirms here that Israel, the nation, had the truth, but did not value it. Jesus in his parable of the invited guests, joins with Paul in saying that those God had compassionately invited to Himself would not be going into the feast. Instead, those along the highways and hedges, Gentile outcasts, would come in. Jesus laments the Holy City and reminds them that He truly wanted to save them, but they, like all of humanity, used their free will against God. The only way that free will can go is against God, in fact.

The picture seems rather dark here, as it did in the beginning of the book. Lost people without hope. Then God gives hope in the person of His Son, provides the way of righteousness seen by Moses and the other prophets. He sends the glad tidings of that fact first to His people Israel. But they will still not repent. They don't get it. They kill their only chance to get to Heaven.

All is lost?

Well, not really. The loss is not total. Keep this in mind as we enter chapter 11. Chapter 9 talks of a remnant of Israel that will be saved. Chapter 10 talks of a word of faith that is within the heart of some who will believe it and confess it and be saved. The light is still shining, though dimly, as we enter this final chapter of the discussion of salvation for Israel and the Gentiles.

11:1

"I say then, has God cast away His people?"

It surely seems so, doesn't it? All we have read seems to point to the fact that God is fed up. Surely other nations have disappeared for similar or even less evils. Their judgment was just. Why can't we close the book on Israel, as many want to do? Paul is about to explain that.

The Greek implies that someone is pushing someone else away. The same word is used in Acts 7:27, where a certain Jew pushed Moses away when Moses was trying to help his people. A perfect picture. God was trying to help His people, but His people Israel, pushed Him away. Paul asks, now is God pushing them away? Rejecting them? Writing them off?

He has already shown that Gentiles are coming into the Kingdom. Isn't that evidence enough that Israel is finished? Salvation was of the Jews, but is no longer? No, what Jesus said to the woman at the well still holds: Salvation is of the Jews. The whole concept of salvation, the need for salvation, the Redeemer Who provides salvation, all comes from Israel and her God.

You know what has to come next. And let it be heard throughout the church world. Paul uses this phrase whenever he wants to be vehemently opposed to what is being suggested. It is not the KJV "God forbid" for "God" is not in the Greek text. Nor is it the NKJV "Certainly not." That is just not strong enough. Why not say what Paul said, "Let it not be!" Perish the thought! May such an idea never be brought into the feeble brain of man.

Israel cast away? Are you kidding? His own people? Yes, that is what Paul calls Israel even after all the prophet-quoting of chapter 10. "His people!"

Three reasons follow for the logically minded. The most obvious one to a thinking man, is Paul himself:

"For I also am an Israelite..."

If Israel is doomed, would this Israelite be standing before you begging you to be reconciled to God as he is? I am not lost. Yet I am a Jew. The church I represent in Jerusalem, and much of the church throughout the Roman world, is Jewish. Israelite. Cast away His people? Far from it! Look at us. Full of the Holy Spirit that the Jew Moses said created our world,

singing the psalms that the Jew David wrote and sang himself, quoting the prophecies all written by Jews. Oh we are very Jewish, and very saved.

How Jewish am I?

“of the seed of Abraham.”

He has already said that there are people descended from Abraham in the flesh who are not true Jews. But he unblushingly claims Abrahamic descent and true Jewishness in the same breath.

“Of the tribe of Benjamin.”

Next to Judah, Benjamin was the tribe most extolled by the Judean Jews. Though technically a part of the greater “Israel”, in the north, Benjamin had geographical and royal ties to the Kingdom that true Jews held high, Judah. Israel’s first king was from Benjamin. David’s best friend was a Benjamite. Saul’s grandson sat at David’s table.

Paul well knows that claiming a natural family attachment is not the same as the spiritual connection, but in this verse he is merely trying to make the point that there were indeed some Jews who were not “cast away”, pushed away from God’s presence. And he was one of them.

Conclusion so far:

11:2

“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”

By adding those last words to the description, Paul gives us reason number two why he knows Israel is not cast away. Israel has been in the mind of God from eternity! He’ll spell this out and give it a name in verse 5, but here the thought is introduced. Don’t mess with Israel, don’t write off Israel, God has a plan and a purpose for Israel that we don’t know yet,

but God knew from forever. Brings us back to chapter 8. “Whom He foreknew, He predestined, and called, and justified, and glorified.”

Paul lets us know here that it is not just individuals who are called to God by elective process. Nations are singled out too. Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. That’s Israel and Edom, nationally, and the results of God’s choice are now obvious.

A sibling might look at sister or brother being spanked and say, “Now Mom/Dad understands. Now they will honor me as the good child, and this bad kid they will remember only for their bad practices. So the world, and much of the church, looks at Israel. Her defiance, and God’s judgment on that defiance. And we all want to say, Bye, bye, Israel! You got what you deserved. Finally justice has been served on those evil Jews.

Not so fast. You too were evil. And God called you out of that evil and saved you. Why are you different than the Jews? Cannot God save whomever He pleases? Is that not what we learned in chapter 9, studying Isaac, and Jacob, and Pharaoh? God chooses and His choices are unalterable. Israel still stands. They are going to go through even worse times, but God is not finished with them.

Need proof? Enter Elijah into Paul’s courtroom, and God’s dealings with him:

“Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah...”

The quote here is from 1 Kings 19:10, 14. Speaking to Jews, Paul can assume they knew their Scriptures. I’m not sure if Paul would quote so much from the Bible speaking to today’s Christians. Do you know what the 1 Kings Scripture says about Elijah’s complaint and God’s response?

“how he pleads with God against Israel, saying...”

For those who might not know the story, Elijah has just won a major victory against the pagan worship instituted by Ahab and Jezebel in Israel. His revival ends with all the Israelites who saw the miracle saying, "The Lord, he is God" over and over. What a day!

In the next scene, we see Jezebel so angry at their defeat, that she vows to kill this prophet. Elijah runs for cover. The angel of the Lord ministers to him, brings him back to his senses, then the Lord Himself begins to talk with his prophet.

"What are you doing here in hiding?"

"I've been very zealous for you! But your people have not been so zealous." Then comes the quote that is here in Romans,

11:3

"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

1 Kings 19: 10, 14. Those words are in verse 10, and repeated in verse 14, of the original story. In between the two pleadings of Elijah something else happens... Let's look at the part in between:

God tells Elijah to stand on the mountain. What mountain? Verse 8 tells us that Elijah had travelled far into the desert, to the mountain of God. Sinai. Six to seven hundred years prior to this moment, none other than Moses himself stood on this very mountain. Wind and earthquake and fire had all been on that mountain then, and God was in it all. But not now. Rather a whispering voice came to the prophet. Elijah had been trembling in a cave during the show of natural power, but when the little voice came, he appeared at the entrance of that cave, and heard God say again what he had already said, What are you doing here?

And Elijah tells God again that Israel is finished. That he alone is left, and soon he will be finished too!

God disagrees. He gives his prophet an assignment to let him know that Israel is far from finished. Jehu is to be anointed and he will start a revival in Israel. Elisha is to now take Elijah's place and will be doing twice what Elijah did.

God's not finished with his people. And oh, by the way, Elijah, there are seven thousand other people in Israel who have never bowed to Ba'al, and never will. I'm not done with Israel. A remnant still serves me.

So we see in verse 4 of our present chapter 11:

11:4

“But what does the divine response say to him? ‘I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al.’ ”

The prophets were, as much as could be, neutral in their opinions. That is, they did not have words of their own about their people. They were not politicians. They spoke what God placed in their hearts, and they believed it. So when Elijah heard of God's anger with His people, he assumed the worst. All are to be judged. Including me. Elijah's courage and power were remarkable, but His hermeneutics were not the best. His ability to interpret what God had said was lacking.

So it is with God's people today. We read of all the evil things Israel has done against the One Who so loved and guided and called them, and we read the awful sentences of Divine judgment, and we assume Israel is finished. Time to start over. The church is now the people of God. That assessment, according to the Spirit-filled hermeneutic of Paul, is uncalled for. Listen carefully. Paul uses the Elijah event as an example of what he has been trying to say for over two chapters.

11:5

“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

Having established that not everyone who is an Israelite is automatically saved, he continues here with the idea of the “remnant.” Paul uses this word and a word related to it, twice in Romans, and nowhere else. But nearly every one of the prophets of Israel used that word. The ones left. The remainder. Many will be judged and excluded. But some will endure. Some, says Paul, elected by grace. Is there a more clear definition of the idea of electing grace than right here?

Think of all the Jews who have lived throughout history. Though the nation of Israel is an elected nation, that nation is to be represented in the final gathering of God’s people, by a relatively small remnant. If I understand correctly, that number is fixed at 144,000.

Seven thousand of those were known in Elijah’s day. Throughout the ages there have been those who have looked to God and God’s provision of a sacrifice for sin. Men who lived before the cross up to and including a dying thief on a cross, who looked with faith to the Son of God, however uninformed they were. Men who have lived since the cross and looked back to the sacrifice and gladly accepted it. Men from every tribe of Israel, however those tribes are to be named, will be represented on that day. 144,000 Israelites will be saved. Remnant Israel.

Others see, and perhaps rightly so, that the elect here are all God’s chosen people, whether Jew or Gentile. And that Paul was only using Elijah’s story as an example of what God is doing universally. Saving a few out of the many. Verse 7 fits better with this idea.

But the idea of a remnant of Israel is indeed a Bible idea, and the Jewish prophets held to it. We now see the expanded notion of a remnant.

11:6

“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works;”

Paul goes back to his main theme again, the basis for salvation. Once he has labeled the remnant a product of grace, even though they are Israelites, their law and the performance of obedience to that law, has nothing to do with the salvation he is defining. If you were saved, Jew or Gentile, by grace, a pure gift from God alone, then you were not saved by works. The two ideas do not fit in the same concept. The moment you try to earn salvation from God by doing good things, you have fallen from grace.

“otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

Grace means, “I am giving you a gift.” Works means, “I want something from you, and I am willing to pay for it. Here is my payment.”

“But if it is of works, it is no longer grace...”

Just repeating the idea that the two ideas, works and grace, are mutually exclusive. “Gift” and “payment” are in two different worlds.

There is a remnant somewhere. For one thing, a remainder of what was once the nation and kingdom of Israel. Though the quantity of that nation has changed drastically, the essence of it is still known as Israel. Not just a few Jews entered into a now-Gentile dominated Kingdom of God. But an abbreviated Israel that has included a huge number of Gentiles without changing its name or its character. Israel is still Israel.

Remnant does not imply extinction. It just means remainder. That which is left. Take a little sparrow. Clip off his wings. Shave off his feathers. Poke out his eyes. Cut off his feet. Oh, a very sad-looking bird sits before you. But he is still a sparrow.

Take an apple tree. The very example Paul will use later in this chapter. Cut off many of its branches. Let the wind blow off all its leaves. Let it be devoid of fruit for a season. Gash its bark with an axe. An apple tree still stands before you. Diminishing does not imply change of identity.

God has made a covenant with Abraham. He has made many promises to Israel. Paul will make clear in this chapter that Israel is not at all finished. Think of it. A Jew will sit on the throne one day and rule the world. Surrounding Him will be Jewish apostles. The names of Jews are on the walls and foundations of the city from which He will rule, a re-made Israeli capital called Jerusalem.

The confusion comes as we discovered earlier, when we see that there are two Israel's. Verse 7 reminds us of that fact.

“Otherwise work is no longer work.”

Here's one of those disputed passages. Modern translations, following older manuscripts, leave off this end of the verse. The Textus receptus, the “received text” has these words. Scholars say that a copyist may have included his marginal notes in the text here. It certainly is a logical addition to the passage. No truth is at stake here. Nothing is added or taken away from the truth of what Paul is saying. I believe you will find this to be the case in all the minor differences between this and that Greek text.

If a man is saved by works, the text says, he can't at the same time be saved by grace. You'd have to redefine works for that to be true, just like you'd have to redefine grace for the opposite idea.

Paul has made his point. Now another stop for a summary of what has been said:

11:7

“What then?”

What have we found here? We started by asking in verse 1 if God is finished with His people Israel. We said, no. Paul himself is a proud Israelite and very much in the center of God’s will. God saw His people from eternity and He is not going to “un-see” them now!

Example: Elijah. He thought Israel was about to burn out forever, with himself being the last Jew on earth, and he about to be exterminated by Jezebel. End of Israel. Plan “B” in action. God says, no, I have a lot of people left besides you. Paul concludes that not only the 7,000 Israelites of that day , but a bunch of others sovereignly elected by God to salvation are going to enter the Kingdom.

His conclusion to the matter at hand:

“Israel has not obtained what it seeks;

This thought goes all the way back to 10:2-3. Israel is zealous. They want to please God in their own way. But their own way is not good enough. They have trusted in their ability to keep the law of Moses and therefore establish their own righteousness. With this righteousness as a badge, they can prove to God and man that they are worthy of God’s acceptance, and all others are not.

Do we not all desire acceptance? Israel wanted it too, but by and large did not receive it.

See that Paul has once more changed the definitions here. Earlier in the chapter he says that God has not cast off His people Israel, whom He foreknew. There he is speaking of the chosen, the elect, the remnant. Here he is speaking of the physical nation again, which includes believing and unbelieving.

We speak that way about the church at times. We are all aware that within the confines of most every church is a group of elect and a group of non-elect. I say "most" because in some places called "church" there may be no saved people at all. And elsewhere, especially in persecuted lands, the entire assembly may be purified and on its way to Heaven.

"but the elect have obtained it."

No amount of working will impress God that you are fit for salvation, worthy to come to Heaven where Jesus, the only Worthy One, dwells. God's determined plan is what decides that matter. His election makes you automatically desirable to Heaven. His purposes in choosing whom He chooses are still a mystery to us, but choose he does. And on that day there will be many "elder brothers" who thought they deserved the inheritance, who will be cast out of fellowship with the Father, while the repentant prodigal will enter into the joys of His Lord and Father Who loved him from the foundation of the world.

Notice I say "repentant." There are many who have fallen away from the church and from righteousness altogether who lift themselves up to a place of honor over church folks, thinking that the fact that they fell away from all of that is the sign that they are now holy.

No. Falling into sin is one thing. But being lifted up to righteous holy living by the in-filling of the Holy Spirit in response to your repentance, that is something else. Unrepentant sinners are going to hell, no matter how much they consider themselves to have been abused or victimized by church people. Those who hate the church, whether the true or false one, are not disciples of Jesus.

So the chosen of God got it. What the Jews wanted all that time of trying, they got it. There is Esau trying his best to please Dad, and that trickster Jacob comes along and gets blessed. Not fair. But God brought his chosen vessel through the fire and to true repentance before it was all over. And Esau? He showed from the start that the things of the God of Isaac were

not all that important to him. He and his people went off into idolatry and extinction.

“and the rest were blinded.”

This is not new to the letter, but it is always painful to see, viewing things as we do from this side of glory. But, he already told us in 9:18 that God has mercy on whom He wills (that’s the elect) and “whom He wills He hardens.”

Hardened. Blinded. Deafened. De-sensitized. Call it what you will, it is a fact of the Christian way. For reasons unknown to us, God chooses some, and lets others go the way of all flesh, the way they have chosen, the way they deserve. And God owes you or me or no one any apology for His choices! He once more appeals to Isaiah,

11:8

“Just as it is written, ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor...’...”

He seems to be in Isaiah 29:10. It helps to read 29:9, (and I am in the NKJV) “Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. [verse 10] For the Lord has poured out on you the Spirit of deep sleep...”

Those following along in the King James will see that “slumber” is the word used, the idea that most closely matches the Hebrew. But Strong’s Concordance suggests that “stupor” is a better word, for it agrees with Isaiah’s context. These folks are not just sleepy like we all get sleepy at night. They are drunk sleepy. Their vision is blurred from imbibing false teachings, false worship. They are idolaters.

How did they get that way? Isaiah and Paul agree: It was God who gave them that spirit. God who gave them over, as in Romans 1, to their own ways.

“Eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear...”

Paul seems to paraphrase the rest of Isaiah’s quote, which says that God has “closed your eyes, namely the prophets; And he has covered your heads, namely, the seers.” God has withheld from His people the very truths they need to come back to Him, because their hearts are hard and they are not coming back.

“To this very day”

Is Paul’s own add-on to the idea. God was angry with Israel in Isaiah’s day. He is angry with them in Paul’s day. He is angry still with all of those Israelites who continue to reject the Messiah He gave them 2000 years ago. They will not have this Man to rule over them.

Has God cast away His people, though? Keep that in mind. Let it not be! There is a remnant whose eyes are wide open. How so? Grace. And the rest are blinded, to Paul’s very day, and to this very day of the 21st century.

David is now called upon to add his amen to the concept of a God who hardens whom He will harden, and save whom He will save. He quotes Psalm 69:22-23.

11:9

“And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them ’ ”

Psalm 69 is largely Messianic in character. It is about those who hate David and Jesus “without a cause.” Those who cause shame to God’s anointed. Those who show no pity to the suffering Servant of God. Those who give Him instead, “gall for My food, and for My thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

By the time David comes to verse 22, there is no doubt that he is speaking about unbelieving Israel. But what does this particular curse mean? How can a table be a snare and a trap and a stumbling block and a recompense?

The table is a happy place. Food, feasting, security, comfort, well-being. But what if the food is poisoned? What if the company is evil? What if Saul sits at the table with javelin in hand, trying to kill the heir apparent? At the Lord's last table was one who would see Him crucified. A table can be a place of ensnarement. May it be so for all those who sit at a table to plot evil things against the Lord. Whose fellowship is conspiracy against the God of heaven. The kings of the earth set themselves at the same table to take counsel against the Lord, to break His power. May they be broken instead. May they fall into their own trap. May they stumble over themselves. May the gallows they prepared for Mordecai be used to hang them.

The quote continues.

11:10

“ ‘ Let their eyes be darkened so that they do not see...’ ”

Immediately we are back in Isaiah, where the prophet is given his assignment, namely (as quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13) , to tell them, “hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”

It could be argued in Isaiah and Matthew that the people hardened their own hearts first and God is just responding to their hardness. But Paul is making the point here, that for whatever reason, for reasons known in

Heaven only, God is doing the hardening now. God is putting them to sleep, closing their eyes, taking prophets and seers and personal understanding away from them.

Ours is not to question God in this, Paul says in chapter 9 and 10 and here. God hardens some people for His own reasons. Believe it and cry out to God that your own heart will always be wide open to the things of God.

There is one more prayer that David makes, which has become a little blurred in the translations:

“ ‘... and bow down their back always.’ ”

Those who have treated the King, especially the Messiah, in a despicable way, turn their fellowship against them. Blind them. And bow down their back. Always.

The Hebrew is translated , “and make their loins shake continually.” One thing the two translations have in common is the time element. Whatever this means, David and Paul say it should be a permanent thing. Always. Continually. You come against the Lord, the Lord comes against you.

Just as neither of the Bible writers is talking about physical eyes being physically blinded, so neither of them is speaking of physical loins or backs. Both parts of the body, whether the reproductive area or the region above it, speak of strength. The curse requested on defiant Israelites is a weakening, a shaking, of moral and spiritual strength. Men who refuse Christ and His salvation are left morally bankrupt. What can they offer to their generation when they have turned down the Heavenly offer?

Look at America today as an example. By and large this nation has refused the God of our fathers. See how the nation fragments, weakens, shakes in its folly. Blind to the things of God, she boasts about becoming great again. But no political policy or political figure can make America great

again. Her greatness came from her God. Now that more and more of her people care little for God, her back is no longer strong enough to bear the weight of God's honor.

So it is with all those who reject God's righteousness.

So Israel is finished, right? If you smile and say yes, you have not been listening! Has God cast away Israel, first question of the chapter? No! A thousand times, No! Read on:

11:11

"I say then, have they stumbled..."

If the question ends there, the answer is clearly positive. You better believe they have stumbled. That goes all the way back to 9:32. Israel did not seek God's righteousness by faith, but by the works of the law. "For they stumbled at that stumbling stone."

To stumble is to trip. Not necessarily to fall. If we are walking together, and you stumble, I can catch you before you fall. Israel didn't know it, didn't acknowledge it as a nation, but God was walking along with them. So Paul can ask, "Have they stumbled

"that they should fall?"

I see the answer coming up, but what is the question? The Greek bears out that the latter part of the question has to do with purpose, or intention. Obviously no individual stumbles with the intention of falling. But someone had an intention, or in this case, did not have an intention, as some might believe, hence the question.

Paul is asking, "Did God purposely put a stumbling block in front of Israel, as one would in front of an old enemy, for the express purpose of Israel falling and staying fallen forever?" It's a fair question, though once again

we are blinded to the possibility that God might indeed do that for a nation. Edom for example. Ammon for example. Canaanite nations, for examples. Some nations are destined by God to fall. They have all chosen wickedness and deserve to fall.

Is that God's purpose with Israel? Is their fall final? The same question, re-done, as in verse 1: Has God cast away His people? Since it is the same question, it gets the same answer:

“Certainly not!”

As before, this explosive response means, “Let it not be!” I disagree with your conclusion. And Paul in disagreeing with those in the first century who would have Israel taken off God's map, so in this twenty-first century those who do not see Israel in their future must be reminded, and given the following reason for the reminder:

“But through their fall...”

Here we must stop and raise an objection to the KJV and NKJV translators. Notice the question answered tells us that Israel is not falling. Why then would Paul say here that they are falling? Great observation, and an easy answer: He didn't. Paul did not use that word here. He used the word that means offence, or trespass. In other words, the original stumble. They are not going to fall ultimately, only stumble. But while they are stumbling, something else is happening in God's program.

This is clearly a revelation from the Spirit to Paul, and we must allow the fullness of this revelation to enter our heart. No one is condoning what Israel has done and is doing: rejecting the God-man Messiah, their own Messiah. It is an evil thing, an unspeakably horrible thing that Israel has done, topping off a history of evil things. No one is passing over this evil dismissively. Israel has sinned.

Israel has stumbled. The Rock of their salvation was in the Way before them, and they stumbled over it. But God says through Paul, it is only a stumble, not a fall.

So read here, from the Textus Receptus Greek, through their trespass, their offence, their stumbling, in the context,

“to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.”

Who but Paul could say something like this? Town after town on his trip through the Middle East and ancient Europe, he goes into a synagogue, proclaims Christ to “the Jew first”. The response, almost universally: Get thee hence! Stoning. Pursuing. Rebuking.

And Paul’s response? Then I will go to the Gentiles, if you are not interested. And he does. And the Gentiles receive him gladly, thrilled that God in Heaven has now included them in His eternal plans. Soon, there are more Gentiles than Jews loving the Jewish Messiah. And so it has been for many centuries now. Salvation has come to the Gentiles. This we know.

But see the insight that Paul has received: to provoke them to jealousy. And suddenly we are in the last chapter, verse 19. But farther back than that, we are in Deuteronomy 32:21, where God, through a song given to Moses, declares that since God’s people tried to provoke Him to jealousy by worshiping gods that are not gods, He would provoke them to jealousy by nations that did not even exist when Moses was singing this song.

We covered this already, but see here how explicitly Paul connects what was said by Moses to what has happened in his own ministry. The Jews are jealous. Let me offer one example of that jealousy from the book that precedes Romans in your Bible, the very history of which Paul speaks. Acts 13.

The scene takes place in the Antioch that is in the Roman province of Pisidia (in modern day Turkey, as opposed to the Antioch of Syria). Rabbi Paul and his party enter the Jewish synagogue and preach a history lesson to the assembled Jews. The history includes the rejection of Jesus, his crucifixion, His resurrection. The Jews listen, then leave. Maybe rankled, but not violent. A few of the Jews follow Paul, most brush it off. At least until next week.

The word has gotten around Antioch about a strange message coming from the synagogue. In fact, the next week, almost the entire town shows up for church! That's when the unbelieving Jews awaken. When they see Gentiles showing up for Paul's message, they are envious of the crowds. Envious that somehow their message is going to be perverted and given to the Goy, the pagans. That's when the contradicting starts. That's when the blasphemy starts. That's when the opposition starts. Jealousy. Just as God had foretold 1500 years earlier.

Paul on that day officially turns to the Gentiles, invites them in, and "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Luke hung around Paul a lot, and picked up his theology, a theology from Heaven. Namely, that God, by grace, saves who He wills. And those so ordained, will believe. Hence that statement I just quoted from him.

Back to Romans. Israel has stumbled. Not fallen. Stumbled over the Jesus that Paul preached. And while they are in the act of stumbling, an act which has continued to this day, some very happy Gentiles walk past them, ordained of God to take their own place in the Kingdom. Not the Jews' place, but a place of their own. Paul continues,

11:12

"Now if their fall..."

Once more we hasten to warn you that that word, “fall” is not in the original, but rather the same word used in the latter part of verse 11, “offence” or “trespass.” The sin of rejecting Messiah. If that sin

“... is riches for the world.”

Look at the imagery. A sin, a trespass against God, that makes the world rich. How so? Consider. What if the Gospel was intended in the mind of God, only for Jews? What if those Gospel rejections throughout Asia and Europe and in every place where Jews live until now, what if that were the extent of the Gospel message’s effect? What if a handful of Jewish believers was indeed the entire Christian church?

What if the Jews had never convinced God to open the door of salvation and the Kingdom, to the nations? No Gentile church anywhere. Africa is still in darkness. America too. And all the continents.

We think though of the parable of Jesus about a king who wanted to throw a party, and invited the obvious people first. The obvious people were busy. So the King invites people who are not so obvious. People sitting all around town with nothing to do. Hungry people. Hurting people. People not clothed too well. In every highway, byway, and alley of the Kingdom, the servants round up a batch of humanity that any of us would ignore, and still ignore.

The obvious guests at God’s eternal party are the Jews. The chosen ones. The family of Messiah. The connections made by the apostles. The Jews. But they have fallen, and this poor world is suddenly made rich by the spreading of Good News everywhere. Evil men are made holy. Weak men are made strong. The angry are made docile. Riches from heaven.

“... and their failure, riches for the Gentiles,”

Tell it like it is, Paul. To reject Christ is to be a failure. If Christ is Life, as He said He is, then to miss Him is to fail at life. Many Jews have failed the

biggest Test life has to offer, the question, What will you do with Jesus? Yet that failure brought the nations in.

Notice he speaks here of “riches for the world” and “riches for the Gentiles.” Truly nations have been blessed to have a church inside of them. I speak not of a “national church” for they have often been the curse to a nation. But when great numbers of the born again grace a country, truly “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” America has been blessed for quite some time in this regard, though she is being weighed in the balance at this present hour.

And because of blessed nations, the world is blessed. When slowly the light of this and then that nation goes out, the world is in trouble. It is exactly this situation that is foretold for the coming reign of antichrist. The Scriptures do not seem, in my opinion, to speak of an end-time revival, but they do speak of end-time apostasy. Gentile acceptance through Jewish failure brought light to the world, and a preservative power.

When Gentiles reject, as did the Jews, darkness descends. But even that darkness is temporary and brings on the greatest Light the planet has seen, the return of Christ to set up His Millennial Kingdom.

It is this end-time scenario, it would seem, that Paul is pointing to in the last part of the verse:

“how much more their fullness!”

Paul sees a time when many Jews – Israel – will return to the Lord. It is an Old Testament theme for sure, and Paul will bring in Isaiah and Moses once more, later in the chapter, to prove this. But Paul’s comments here, added to the prophecies of the Revelation given by John, confirm yet again that God is not finished with Israel.

God was on His way to blessing the entire world. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” The Jewish Messiah, hailed by

every Jew, spells Kingdom. But the Kingdom, that is the visible expression of that Kingdom, was put on pause. What? The subjects of the Kingdom aren't interested in the King God has chosen? What, the Kingdom people don't want to obey the rules I have put in place for the Kingdom? How can this be?

Then let's get some servants together to find more subjects. I will not be thwarted in this way. Those servants, we call the church. They are still busily finding other subjects for God's Kingdom, though some of them have been distracted into other commitments.

But one day, the fullness of the Jews will come to their King, accept Him, and then comes the Kingdom, and even greater riches to the Planet! Ungodliness gone, and... but I get ahead of the story. Let Paul now expand on this idea of a temporary reconstituting of His Kingdom. Jews stumble, Gentiles enter. What does that look like? Verse 13.

11:13

"For I speak to you Gentiles."

The letter to the Romans is addressed to all (believers) in Rome. But after the opening salvos, Paul seems to turn his attention to the Jews. He talks of "you" and "we" and "us", speaking of His Jewish relatives. There are sections of the letter that point to his return to all the people of God.

By chapter 9 he is still talking Israel, but in the third person. Now he directly addresses the Gentile element of the church, to show them their part in this Jewish thing, how God is going to bring it all together.

Remember what he has said so far. Israel stumbled, and Gentiles got rich over it. He expands on this,

"inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles..."

It's good to know who you are and what you are supposed to do. In the story of his calling, in Acts chapter 9, God makes it clear to the Christian Ananias, who was a little timid about approaching the great Saul of Tarsus with an invitation to baptism. God tells him, "He is a chosen vessel of mine, to bear My name before Gentiles..."

That was clear enough. But it was mixed with the notion that God would always send him to the Jew first. So he obediently went to the Jews, and God in the process of that obedience, opened incredible doors to the Gentiles. It became clearer as the years went by that God was using him to do something that none of the "Twelve" had experienced.

"...I magnify my ministry,"

"Magnify" would otherwise be "glorify." Bring honor to. Rejoice in. And "ministry" is from diakonia or "service." Official service.

Paul says, I realize now that God has called me to open the door to Gentiles, and I am thrilled about it! What a glorious honor this is! What a heavenly service God has granted to me! To think that I could be used to fulfill God's promises through the prophets to bring in a people beyond the natural borders of the Promised Land, into the Kingdom of God. This is a glorious work!

Perhaps all of us need to take a look at the gift or position God has given us, and rejoice with God that we are counted worthy to such an office. We do not glorify ourselves, but give glory to God for entrusting us with heavenly purposes and abilities.

Unfortunately, some have magnified themselves and honored themselves and promoted themselves, rather than the Divinely appointed gift.

11:14

"... if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh..."

We have quoted the Scripture twice that promises God will provoke His people to jealousy. Paul sees himself as one who is fulfilling that promise. He is being given a unique opportunity, as a Jew among Jews, to so aggravate his kin as to push them into a realization, if possible, that God honors faith over family. Even the great Jewish family, with all its incredible heritage, must step aside in the thinking of the Jew, as Paul introduces, yea re-introduces, the faith factor.

He must hold before their eyes a scene of pagans from all over the planet, streaming into the Kingdom of Abraham and Moses and David.

“... and save some of them.”

Here is the remnant again, in small print. Heed every clue. Paul has no misgivings here. All Israel will be saved, as he will show later in the chapter, but not all Israelites. Only some. He is going to give his life to bringing Gentiles in right and left, so that some of his Jewish brethren will come in.

“Some” is not a pleasant word to us. We desperately pray that all of our kin will make it. All of our group, our church. But only the remnant will be there. In spite of all our will-power, our desire, our work, only some make it.

Is that disappointing? Heartbreaking? What must God be going through? Though we affirm election, we allow the tension of another thought to enter this discussion: God is not willing that any should perish. He wants all to be saved.

Struggle with that awhile. Knowing all the while that only a remnant will be there.

11:15

“For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world...”

People loving to find contradictions in the Bible will stop short here. Trouble is, this seems to be Paul vs Paul, and that never really happens. Paul is consistent. He won't contradict himself. So why does he talk here about Israel being “cast away”, when in verse 1 he assures us that God has certainly not cast away His people?

In the first place it is a bit helpful to know that two different Greek words are used here. Their meanings do overlap. 11:1 uses *apothomai* which means to “push off” or to “reject”. 11:15 uses a form of *apoballo*, to “throw off” or “lose.”

But the context of the passage is the most helpful. It seems clear to me that in verse 1 Paul is talking about a permanent arrangement. Has God forever said I am finished with Israel? They are no longer my people, ever. I reject them eternally? Of course not.

On the other hand, did Israel stumble? Yes. Have their hearts been hardened to the Gospel? Yes. Is God therefore not to have a Kingdom? Will Jewish rejection of God close the door to God's desire to have a family? Absolutely not! The King will find people to come in, and this is the meaning of the rest of this clause, “the reconciling of the world.”

God now frees himself, and you see it working itself out through Paul's ministry, to invite the world to come in. The Great Commission now kicks in officially. The apostles had already been told to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every person in the creation. Strange that they didn't see “Gentiles” in that picture.

But now they do. Their fellow Jews have nixed the Gospel message. God sets them aside, lets them stay in stumble mode, and works around them to fill His house with people from all over the world.

Will the entire world therefore be saved? The universalists jump in here and make some commotion to that effect. But a glance around the world makes it obvious that not all are responding to the King's gracious invitation. Nor will they. The reconciliation is available to all. But when two parties are at enmity with one another, both must bury the hatchet. In the case of God's offer, only He has done so, because of Jesus, and been willing to forgive all. Those who choose to remain enemies will not be forced in.

Paul has already spoken of this, in 5:10-11. When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.... Through Jesus we have received the reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

Consider the very words before us, "reconciling of the world". And it all came about because Israel was not interested in their Messiah! How miraculously ironic. How wonderfully God puts everything together. Using the frailty of man to save the world! Indeed, he goes on, if this tragedy of Jewish rejection has brought us into the Kingdom, what will happen when they finally accept and are accepted?

".. what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

A little thornier group of words. Paul looks ahead to a time when Israel will indeed accept their Saviour, and mourn for their sins. It's in the prophets. It's in Revelation. It's coming. Paul knew it. He's excited to think about it now.

"Their acceptance." Is this God's acceptance of them or their acceptance of God's salvation? The King James added "of them" and the New King puts in "their", but neither with any Greek authority behind them. That is, "their" is not in the Greek. But in viewing the entire sentence, and seeing "their" in the last clause, it becomes clear that the addition of that word here makes sense.

Their rejection started the opening of the door to the Gospel. That is, God's rejection of them. Therefore, God's acceptance of them will bring even greater blessing: life from the dead. What could that mean? Paul realizes that this is not an easy saying, and spends the next ten verses explaining it!

In short I say here, that Israel is going to resurrect. Not talking about the resurrection from the dead that all of us in Christ will experience. Paul is going to show you now how Israel the nation is coming back from its long sleep of spiritual death. I see shades of Ezekiel's dry bones here, don't you? A nation dead and buried but rising from its graves, coming into the land of Israel, and being what God intended from the beginning.

Hang on. "Life from the dead" is the theme now:

11:16

"For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump is also holy;"

The analogy is hidden to us without a little digging. "Fruit" and "lump" seem to have no connection whatever. The "firstfruit" is the beginning of something. In this case, it is the beginning of a sacrifice offered to God. With the "lump" idea following, it can only mean the beginning of a bread-offering, as in Numbers 15:19-21. Loaves of bread were given to the Lord for the priests and Levites to have sustenance for their work.

A "lump" can be a mass of clay, as Paul has already indicated in 9:21, or, more commonly, a mass of dough. Whether baked or unbaked is not the issue here. The point being made is that when an Israelite offered a cake-offering for the priests, the first bite of that cake, or loaf, or lump, was holy, as was the entire cake.

Once God pronounces something holy, holy it is. A bite has been taken out of Israel. Then comes the stumble. But the entire loaf is still waiting to be addressed and consumed. God did not throw away the bread after the

first bite, however bitter the taste may have been. Israel is holy. From first bite to last.

You see how this fits into life from the dead? Israel shot itself in the foot. But it's coming back, purged and cleansed and holy as ever.

Let's look at his second picture, which he extends a little longer:

“and if the root is holy, so are the branches.”

This one is a little easier to understand. We're looking, as we see later, at an olive tree. Planted in the ground, it puts down roots. Whatever those roots produce is of the same nature as the roots.

God planted Israel via the man Abraham. A holy man. A man who eventually, through faith, produced another holy man, Isaac. Then Jacob. And the sons of Jacob. And the Kingdom. A holy people. A holy root. The sap running through that tree is holy sap. It will produce holy branches and fruit.

A perfect picture. But wait. Something happened to that holy tree. A bad vine attached to it? A disease attacked it? Not sure of the best way to describe, using Paul's analogy, the downfall of that tree. But fall it did.

Jesus seems to be speaking of this downfall in Matthew 21. The parable of the wicked vinedressers, who were the present rulers of the Kingdom of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus states that the Kingdom is to be taken from them and given to a nation that will bear the fruit he is looking for.

He does not say, “nations”, as in Gentiles. He does not say, Israel is done, Gentiles are in. He says another nation is going to take charge. Put it all together. What we have already seen in Romans, and what Jesus says, and the prophets have said. There is a remnant of grace that will accept

their Messiah by faith. Together with grafted-in Gentiles, as we will soon read here, a new nation will be formed. New, but old.

When we are raised from the dead, we will be new, but old. We will recognize something of the old, though we have been totally renewed. So, Israel. A new nation of Israel, made up of parts of the old, is coming. The branches, many of them, will survive. The sap will continue to flow. That which he began He will finish. What looks like the end, even in Jesus' words to the leaders of Israel in His day, is not the end after all, says Paul.

Life from the dead. The dead tree. The bitten off bread. Mercy is coming to Israel. More occurs to Paul as he speaks of this imaginary tree:

11:17

“And if some of the branches were broken off...”

This seems pretty clear. This is another way of saying what Paul already said, namely that only a remnant of Israel will be saved. He's talking about some branches of the Israel tree, that is, many individual Israelites that did not, will never, come to true faith. Men who trusted in their heritage and not their God. In their law and not the grace of God. In their own wisdom and not the wisdom of God.

God has a tree called Israel, planted in the garden of Abraham's heart, 2000 years before Jesus came. That tree got infested with a disease, but did not die. But branches had to be broken off to save the tree from ultimate destruction,

“and you...”

Who is the “you” here? Verse 13, “I speak to you Gentiles.” He's talking about Israel but he's talking to us Gentiles so we will understand how we fit into God's program. The program seems very limited as you read

through the Old Testament, but Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, opens the door to you. Notice what he calls you,

“being a wild olive tree...”

“oleaster” is the official translation of the Greek here. It is a species of the olive tree, but different from the tree that is being used as an example of Israel. That tree, the Israel tree, is typified by the old stately olive trees that grow in that part of the world. True to the analogy, those old trees, as they age, become less and less productive. Old branches producing no olives have to be broken off, and young shoots are grafted in.

The comparison is very helpful. Both trees are olive trees. Both are humans in need of God’s grace. They are similar in many ways. But at the same time they are a different species. Jew and Gentile can be very different from each other, yet the underlying characteristics are the same.

God wants to show grace to a Tree that He will plant in His garden forever. The tree is named Israel forever. But the branches, called Israelites, can be broken off if they do not produce fruit.

Paul then talks about our grafting. But he gives a serious warning, that will sound more and more like Jesus’ own warning to us in John 15. Security is not to be found in the tree, or the vine of Jesus’ analogy. Security is only in Him. There will be many Jews that look like they belong in that tree, but they do not. And many grafted-in Gentiles who similarly seem to fit and be snug there. They too can be cut off.

But the word is “seem.” They were in the tree, but not of the tree. Paul will enlarge this idea.

“were grafted in among them,”

So you take a twig, or a shoot from a young plant, cut it a certain way, and unite it to a branch of an established tree in such a way that it is able to

receive the life-giving sap, the nutrients, from the old tree. After a while, a healing takes place, a unity is formed, and the new and the old are one.

This is what happened to you, Christian, whether you knew it or not. The same faith that was in Abraham was in you. The same joy that was in David was in you. That Holy Spirit that touched down in the Temple was now touching you.

Ephesians 2, addressed to the Gentile church, says this: (vs 11-13).
“Remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh... at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus.”

Here’s a Jew talking to Gentiles about being brought near to Israel. That is what he is saying here. When you were saved, you were grafted into a tree called Israel. That explains why born-again Christians have this very “Jewish” heart. They love the Old Testament stories, and feel they are one with them. They love the whole idea of “Israel”, even if they differ among themselves as to what Israel is. They love their Jewish Messiah and His Jewish apostles who are the foundation-stones of the church to which they belong. They were grafted in among them...

“...and with them...”

With them? Try to imagine just how difficult it was and is for the Jew to hear this. Read with me, as a reason for this difficulty, portions of Psalm 79. Asaph complains to God how the nations – that is, the Gentiles – have come into Israel, defiled the Temple, laid Jerusalem in heaps. Dead Jews everywhere. Blood. No one to bury. A scorn and derision. Asaph even mentions God’s jealousy here. Israel had provoked God to jealousy by worshiping other gods.

What is Asaph's prayer? Pour out your wrath on the Gentiles. Then provide atonement for our sins! He wants vengeance. And yes, God owns vengeance and will repay. The Babylonians that are probably referenced in Psalm 79, were overcome by the Persians. The city of Babylon has been singled out for centuries as a target of God's wrath.

But! Not all Gentiles will be destroyed. God will call a people out of the Gentiles, Israel, and add them to you. Gentiles! The nations! The wild olive tree with the old established olive tree, side by side being fed from Heaven's sap.

"...became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree."

The root: Whatever Israel had and was promised, we now have and are promised. The law? It is written in our hearts. The ritual, the temple, the feast days? All fulfilled in Christ and somehow manifested in us. The coming Kingdom the Jews longed for? It's still coming, and getting larger all the time. It will manifest when all the sons of God are gathered together at Jesus' return.

The fatness: Modern translations have placed "root" and "fatness" into one phrase, fat, or rich, root. But the Greek bears out two separate ideas. The root speaks of origins. But the fatness speaks of results. God has abundantly blessed the seed of Abraham. His people have been given all the eternal securities that heaven can afford. They have communion with the God of Heaven. Their sins are all blotted out. One day the wealth of the entire world will be in their possession. "The meek shall inherit the earth." All of this began as a small root in Genesis, but by Revelation it has become a tree that encompasses everything. That's richness, fatness.

Next comes that warning of which I spoke. And of which Jesus spoke.

11:18

"do not boast against the branches..."

Gentiles are warned here not to take a superior attitude toward fallen Jews. Gentiles are saved by grace, not because they are better than the Jews. Fallen Jews may only be fallen temporarily, backslidden. They may still be the real branches after all.

How many Christians of our day despise Jewish people? This anti-semitism unfortunately has its roots in what is only *called* church, from its early centuries to this day. The Jews crucified Christ. God is angry with the Jews and is going to punish them. Therefore we must punish them too. So goes the theory. But it is an unwise way to view the people of Israel.

Corrie Ten Boom and a host of others during World war 2, hid Jewish people from the ravages of the Holocaust. Many in the professing church of that day turned their eyes the other way, turned their back on the Jews. Which church members do you believe God was happy with?

Was Jesus speaking of the suffering Jew when he pronounced blessing on those who fed and clothed Him, Jesus, in His destitute condition? But, Lord, we never saw you. But you cared for the least of these my brethren... (Matthew 25)

In the natural, the Jews are the brethren of Christ. Perhaps the least, but still the brethren in the flesh. We must never boast against family members of Jesus Christ. We need to have our memories jogged. And if we do get proud every once in a while, Paul has a solution for us:

“... but if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”

You owe your life in Christ to the Jew. It was to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, that the covenants came, not to some Gentile King or prophet. That is the root of our faith. That's where it all started. God promising Abraham. Slowly the nation and the Kingdom unfolded. The nation and the Kingdom sprung from the root, not from the Gentiles.

The Kingdom in its fullness has been suspended while the Jewish King looks for more subjects for His Kingdom. A church is formed for that purpose. The church itself then is a support group of the Jewish Kingdom of God. The Abrahamic root underlies it all and is the reason you are here, Gentile believer!

You are not the reason the Kingdom or the church exists. You are the product. You do not support the root, the root supports you. Imagine a branch at the top of the tree, if it had a brain, shouting out to the rest of the tree, "Fear not, tree, I'll support you!" And here comes a storm. Thunder, lightning, mighty winds. The next morning, that proud branch is on the ground, supporting nothing. Be careful, proud Gentile. If you have a brain, don't use it to believe a lie.

But the foolish branch won't hear it and needs convincing.

11:19

"You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' "

That same proud spirit will look to history and logic and "common sense." Look, look what Israel did. All through their long history, falling into idolatry and perversions of all sorts. God had to judge them repeatedly. Assyria. Babylonia. Rome. Hitler. Enough is enough. Israel is a lost cause. We are the new Israel. Spiritual Israel.

There is of course some truth in this reasoning. But it doesn't account for the mercy of God. Nor does it account for prophecy that sees Israel supervising a Kingdom in the very end of all things earthly. It holds to old definitions and boundaries. But Paul has already made clear that there is a true and a false Israel. He's declared that a remnant will be saved and branches will be broken off. But not once has he backed off on the proposition that God has not cast off His people whom He foreknew, by which He means in this context, Israel. No, Israel stands and all her critics

and judges and destroyers, fall. Where is Assyria today? Where is Babylonia today? Rome may rise again, but it will fall again, and forever. Not Israel.

Though the sentiments of this verse might be spoken by a proud man, Paul agrees with the basic idea, for it is the idea he has been advancing. Branches were broken off that you might be grafted in. Sure enough, or

11:20

“Well...” (Well said. I agree. That’s true, but...) “Because of unbelief they were broken off.”

Lest you forget, Mr. Gentile, there is a reason why branches fall to the ground. They are dead. Fruitless. Unbelieving. Worthless to the Kingdom. And as Jesus said in John 15, “Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” They did not abide in the vine, or stay connected to the main source of life and nutrition. Faith.

“And you stand by faith.”

There is one rule that governs the life principle of the people of God, whether Jew or Gentile. Faith. Stop believing, and see how long your connection to God is assured. Branches were broken off because they stopped believing and trusting and therefore obeying God. God was no longer important to them. They trusted in their pedigree or their money or their position or their good health, but not in their God. Dried up. Withered.

Paul admonishes us to check things out. Do we have true faith in the true God? Or have we simply lived off the faith of the branches around us, hoping their strength would cover for us? You stand by your own faith or eventually you do not stand at all. Make it personal. And as Paul adds,

“Do not be haughty, but fear!”

The fearful are encouraged to be bold. But the bold without reason, that is, the proud and the haughty, are told to fear. Those who rebel at such a directive may be the very ones who need it most. "My God would never tell me to be afraid of something," you say. "The righteous are as bold as a lion." Yes, He would. He just did. Are you one who looks down your nose at the Jew who has fallen away? At the church member who has fallen away? At the poor, poor, pagans in other lands? What is the difference between you and them? Faith. Your attitude must not be one of despising the fallen, but humbly praying for them and carefully watching your own heart, to be sure you are in the faith.

Now a verse that could well be, for me, the most troublesome in all of Romans, in the light of the teaching of Paul on election. It almost seems as though Paul is speaking against Paul. We know that this is not true, but it is important that we examine the verse carefully.

11:21

"For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either."

This is a follow-up on what he has just said in the verse before, Fear! Don't be proud! And in it can be found a parallel to the teachings earlier in the book about a real Israel and a not-real Israel. A true Jew, and a Jew in name only.

Here the message is to Gentiles, from verse 13. "I speak to you Gentiles." Most of the church in our day, and a growing number in Paul's day, is Gentile. Paul looks out over the Gentile church and says the same thing to them that he would say to his own people. There is a true believer and there are believers in name only.

We have no way of knowing, ultimately, who are the true members of the church of Jesus Christ. So we say to the whole church, Some of you may

not be spared. We speak not to the true church in saying this, any more than Paul would speak condemnation to the true Israel. But which branches are elect and therefore true? I don't know, neither do you, neither did Paul.

Peter is in agreement, when he urges his readers in 2 Peter 1:10 to *make their call and election sure*. Yes, there is election. No, not everyone in the visible church has been elected. A person may be sitting there in the midst of the branches of the Kingdom like they're the real deal, until a big wind comes along and blows them away.

It could be that when Paul speaks of "natural" branches, he has reference to the natural man, or physical Israel, Israel after the flesh. Natural, if it is not re-made into spiritual, will not make it. You may have filled the seat of a natural-born Jew, and be assured that you belong in his place, and even despise the one who formerly occupied that place. But if you too are only "natural", that is, a Christian only by your physical appearance at church, your baptism, your tithe, you too will be cut off.

11:22

"Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God:"

Because there is a calling of God, by grace, to be a part of an everlasting Kingdom, and because God has called you and many others to that Kingdom, and because many are called but few have actually been chosen, and because many fell already and did not continue in the call of God, because of all of that, let's take a good look at how good God is, and how severe.

That word severe is only used by Paul in the New Testament, and only here. It comes from a family of words that have to do with being decisive, or abrupt. A doctor is viewing the massive spread of gangrene in a patient's leg and immediately decides, that leg has to go. Argue as you will, that leg is going. An abrupt, decisive, severe doctor. But he saves

lives. God looks at Israel's branches and sees many of them decaying and diseased and makes a severe decision: those branches must go if the tree is to live. But I will not have a diseased-looking tree. Fill up those empty places with these fresh branches over here. Abrupt. Decisive. Severe decisions. What, fill up a Jewish tree with Gentiles? That is my decision, severe as it sounds. My tree will be full and beautiful.

"on those who fell, severity."

Remember here that in all of this Paul never says that Israel as a whole is fallen. But branches fell. Cut off. A severe decision made. If they will live in idolatry and the flesh and constant disobedience, cut them off.

And we must add that the remnant that is left is the remnant of the election, the election of grace. No surprises here. They were never a part of the picture in God's eternal foreknowledge. Even in the predictions of Deuteronomy, God was showing that He knew what was coming. They are not all Israel, which are of Israel, Paul has told us.

"but toward you, goodness."

Still speaking to Gentiles, and saying what he has already said. When the Jews as a nation stumbled, God took advantage of the openings to invite an innumerable company of non-Israel people to come in and enjoy the blessings of the commonwealth and the coming Kingdom. Truly God has been good to His people. The goodness that would have been poured out on the fallen Israelites is now being poured out on you. Forgiveness. Eternal life. A Kingdom. All things are yours.

But wait. I see a very difficult word in the text ahead:

"If."

To read this Romans passage lifted up from its surroundings, is to do damage to the meaning. But in the flow of everything Paul has said from chapter 9 until now, the “if” is not so problematic.

If what?

“you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”

How do we know who the true Israel, the true Jews, are? These are the ones who continued on to love their Messiah, whether already or in the coming revelation to them in the end times. No one is saying that Israel is saving itself. No one is saying that the Jews are saved by some work or merit. Just that they will come to Christ and they will be on that tree.

Same with Gentiles. The “if” could just as well be “since.” True believers, the remnant of whom Paul speaks, *will* continue in His goodness. God will consistently provide the means for them to do it so that every step of the way they will be saying it was grace that brought them step by step.

Lifted from its context, Paul seems to be saying that there is some doubt about our salvation. Remember he is talking to the entire *visible* church. There are many members of the visible church who will not be continuing in His goodness, and will be cut off. That does not take away from the fact that the elect seen from the foundation of the world will continue, will persevere, will not be cut off. Those whom the Father has given to His Son are in, and they stay in. As 11 of the 12 disciples stayed in. The one was also chosen, but chosen to betray the Lord. He had a mission and a place prepared for him, and he went to that place. (Acts 1:25, “Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”)

The only thing that is required of a believer who reads this serious text, is to be very sure he is Christ’s and Christ is his. Once that is determined, nothing will exclude him or her from the reward of eternal life.

And some good news for the stumbling Jew:

11:23

“And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”

Here is a startling piece of news. A temporarily fallen away Jew who in the hardness of his heart turned away from the God of Israel, can be brought back into fellowship, when Messiah reveals Himself to him.

Do you know whom you are talking to when you converse with an apostate Jew? A Christ-rejecting Jew? Are you sure you want to have negative feelings about this person? Do you realize that one day, and maybe through your own testimony, that person may be back in the tree?

See how graphically Paul makes the case about Israel in these verses. There are true Jews and false Jews. But even false Jews can become true Jews and be added to the tree. There are Gentiles in the Jewish tree, some true, some false. When their falseness is exposed, they too can be dropped from the tree. There is no way to look at the “tree”, the visible Kingdom of God as it stands now, “Israel”, the “church”, and be able to make a count, and decide just how the Kingdom is faring. At any given moment the “tree” is populated by true and false branches, and the pile of seemingly dead branches under the tree is likewise populated with the true and the false.

Make no judgments until the last day. The day when only God’s opinion of people’s status will matter. He explains the process a little more in the next verse:

11:24

“For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature...”

He's still speaking to the Gentile here, and reviewing what he said in verse 17. There was a group of branches from every Gentile nation that God called from their wild state, their non-Jewish state, their pagan state of dis-fellowship with the God of Heaven...

“and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree...”

Imagine a country bumpkin taken out of the wilds of the hill country, and brought into the palace to marry the princess. Wild meets cultivated. This is against the natural order. Princesses marry into the nobility. Hill people with their simple life-styles, marry those who match more readily with them.

But if you, with all your wildness and undeserving nature, were suddenly brought to Israel, God's special Kingdom with all its glorious past and future,

“how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”

If that does not take the wind out of those Gentile sails, I don't know what will. Gentiles in the church today look around them and see nearly nothing of Israel. They puff themselves up and say, See, Israel is finished. We have replaced those nasty Jews altogether. Paul says, Not so fast. This tree you occupy, look at the name scratched into the bark at the very base: I-S-R-A-E-L. Its their own tree! Don't be shocked when one day the rest of the remnant suddenly surfaces, and many Gentiles who thought their place was so secure will be gone. If we must talk about replacement theology, let's talk about that replacing! Jews replacing Gentiles in their own tree.

See how easily they fit. They are the natural branches. They were the originals. Sons of Judah and Ephraim and Benjamin. Natural branches that have been supernaturally revived and called back to the promises of God.

Paul goes even deeper into the mystery called Israel in the next verse:

11:25

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery...”

No teacher likes ignorant students. Paul is still a rabbi. He is still trying to teach the people of God, the ways of God. He wants them to get every point. And remember he is still speaking to Gentiles specifically here, about their fellow Christians in that church of Rome who are Jewish, and about the greater Jewish community outside the church. He says, Don't miss what I am about to tell you. A mystery. *Musterion*. Something that has been shut up and silenced until now. A secret not before revealed to the sons of men.

Paul uses the word nearly twenty times in his writings. The Revelation of John contains the word only four times, by contrast. Paul mentions in Ephesians 3 the specific call he had to receive and divulge this mystery to the church: (3-6) “By revelation He made known to me the mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body...”

The shock is not that Jews are a part of Israel. The shock is that massive numbers of Gentiles are a part of Israel. Unheard of idea. But Paul now explains the part of the mystery that made all this possible. It is something he has already alluded to, but here is the “behind-the-scenes” revelation. And remember that he is sharing this little secret,

“lest you should be wise in your own opinion”

Or, “estimation.” You're getting all this attention. The Spirit is falling on you. Your lives are changing. Your understandings are enlightened. And you look around and see Jews, for the most part, who hate you for it, and

even would kill you if possible. The temptation is to write these Jewish scoundrels off forever and rejoice in your new-found status. Paul again warns them to be careful, this time by revealing a mystery, and here it is:

“that blindness in part has happened to Israel.”

Blindness? Has “happened”? Like accidentally? Oh no, we get glimmers of this from Jesus Himself, quoting Isaiah to His disciples. Why do you speak in parables, they asked? Because to some it has been given to know the mysteries of heaven, but not to others. To you, disciples, Jews, yes, understand. To these other Jews, no. Don’t understand: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand. Seeing you will see and not perceive... their eyes they have closed lest they should see...”

Blindness. Let the theologians at this point figure out who started it. But there’s no question here in Romans that God Himself is doing the hardening. In part. Not all of Israel. The Jews that Jesus called were not hardened. They were given grace to hear and to see and to believe and to obey. Paul, hardened just a few years before, is also being given grace.

What is all this about? We see through a glass darkly. Even Paul with all his insights made that claim. But one thing is sure here. One outcome is clear to the apostle to the Gentiles: Blindness in part has happened to Israel

“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

The fullness. The exact number. The number and names and faces God saw from the foundation of the world just as surely as He saw elect Israel. There is a set number of Gentiles who will flow into the Kingdom of God. We learn later that it is from every family, every nation, every people on earth. Some here, some there, some everywhere. But not all. Just as with Israel, not all.

But put it all together. Ingrafted Gentiles, original branch Jews, and what do you have?

11:26

“And so all Israel will be saved...”

Take that statement out of its context and read it without a parent idea, and you have a misleading notion. Every Jew from all time, including all the Jews alive today, all the Israelites being gathered from all over the world? That’s what it sounds like, using this statement by itself.

But look where we have been! Elect Israel. Elect Gentiles. God hardens some, has grace on others. Not just nations, but individuals. There is a true Israel and a not-true Israel. There are true Gentile branches and not-true Gentile branches. But when all is said and done, the tree stands, and every branch in it belongs in it because it was seen from the foundation of the world. Israel. The people of God.

“As it is written...”

Paul will now back up his claim of a coming salvation for all the true nation of Israel, the elect nation of Israel, by once more quoting Isaiah: (59:20)

“ ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion...’ ”

In dealing with Paul’s quotes from the Old Covenant, recall that at times he is using the Septuagint version, at other times he is, by inspiration we believe, interpreting the text, and/or applying it directly to Messiah and His work today. When the variant translations are all placed side by side, it will turn out that they all come to the same thought.

Here, Isaiah says “Redeemer” instead of “Deliverer.” These two words amount to the same thing: Freedom. Salvation. One who pays the price and sets men free. We all know who the Redeemer is.

Paul says He will come out of Zion. Isaiah says He will come to Zion. First one, then the other, but both are true.

As to the identity of “Zion”, Scriptures speak of this term in many ways. Originally it was simply a hill in Jerusalem that served as a stronghold against the enemies of Israel. David conquered this hill and its surroundings. Later the term began to apply to the entire city, not just the hill. The Jews today who love Jerusalem and desire it once more to have its ancient place are known as Zionists. John in Revelation sees Jesus standing on Mt. Zion with 144,000 remnant Jews. And Hebrews 12:22 puts the final application on it when he declares that Christians have come already, in the Spirit, to Mount Zion, the heavenly city called Jerusalem.

All this talk of a Redeemer coming to Zion cannot help but bring to our mind the old song based on Isaiah 51:11, “Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads...”

So the Redeemer/Deliverer comes to Zion, then out of Zion he goes to do the work described in the next part of the verse:

“ ‘And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’ ”

“And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” says Isaiah. Jacob is Israel. He comes to a people who by His own grace have turned away from sin. In the setting up of His Kingdom He will establish the rules of the New World Order. His own covenant people will be filled with the righteousness of the Spirit already. But those who enter the Millennial Kingdom will also be expected to measure up to the new way. In the Kingdom foreseen by the prophets, a King will rule in righteousness.

Isaiah continues through Paul, verse 21 of Isaiah 59:

11:27

“ ‘For this is my covenant with them...’ ”

God has made an eternal agreement with Israel. That is the only reason Israel exists. When God said to the sun and the stars and our planet, “Be”, those things will be until God says otherwise. Israel has been in the mind of God from eternity and will not be obliterated either by Babylonians, Romans, or antichrist. God knows how to keep His promises.

But wait. Weren’t we talking about Gentiles? Yes, the coming in of the Gentiles is being made possible by the hardening temporarily of His special people Israel. Blindness. In part. Until the elect Gentiles are brought in from every nation on earth. Then Israel will be the Israel that God foresaw in Isaiah, delivered from its sin by the coming Redeemer Jesus Christ.

“ ‘When I shall take away their sins.’ ”

Search high and low, you will not find this last portion of the quote in Isaiah 59. You will find something like it in the Septuagint, in Isaiah 27:9, and in Jeremiah 31:34. Scholarship is puzzled about this ending, with some concluding that Paul is merely adding those words himself, to explain “turning away from ungodliness” in verse 26.

But the point is made. The final salvation of all Israel , that is, elect Israel, comes about in connection with the Messiah’s work at the cross, taking away all of Israel’s sin. Now Paul comments further on what he has just said.

11:28

“Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake,”

How is that for the wisdom of God? Israel, by God’s own choosing, has become an enemy to Gentile Christians, and even to God Himself, for the sake of Gentile Christians. If they had not fallen away for a while, no Gentile would have been allowed in.

Notice he says, “concerning the Gospel.” They are not to be our enemies in the natural, as some have made them. As Islam has made them. As apostate Romanism in the Darkest of the church’s ages, made them. As “brilliant” scholars of Protestantism today have made them. They are not to be treated as the world treats its enemies, with disdain, and hatred, and ridicule, and threats, and violence. Jesus taught us to love even our worst enemies. And these are not our worst enemies at all, but beloved enemies: they made the way for our entrance into the things of God!

If they have become God’s enemies, as they have, God deals with them. That dealing has been severe and long-term and is not over yet. But that is God’s business. Ours is still to stand by, as a sibling who must watch a brother or sister get a sound whipping, and have compassion and pity, and fear lest we should come to the same end.

“but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”

The father who with tears dripping down his face must correct an erring child is not thinking of getting rid of the child when the beating is finished. He is thinking of how this correction will do its work and how father and son can live happily ever after.

God has chosen Israel. Therefore they are beloved even in the midst of a Holocaust. Why? Because God has a plan for this people that began in Abraham and the other forefathers of the faith. That plan, and the promises made to them, will be carried out. He never once thinks otherwise. Beloved enemies.

11:29

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

“Without repentance” in the KJV can be a little misleading, though it is technically correct. Once God has given something, He does not take it back, unless it was announced as a conditional gift from the beginning. Some of the promises of the law are of this latter nature. Do good and you will be blessed. Do evil and you will be cursed.

But the promises that came to the fathers are not subject to “repentance”. That is, they cannot be called back based on something that man does.

I will make you a great nation, Abraham. Promised. Done.

In you, Abraham, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Not just the Jewish ones. But people from all tribes will come in to rule a Messianic world one day, and that world will be a blessed one. Nothing shall stop that plan. And that plan is to come through the seed of Abraham, which touches us through Christ who is of that lineage.

So God gave great gifts to His people Israel. The Scriptures, the land, the Messiah Himself. All these gifts are given and will not be recalled. Through the Jewish people God has already blessed the world but greater things are coming. God has promised and God cannot lie or change His mind, no matter how unfaithful people become.

In one final commentary on his own principles he compares the mercy given to Israel to the mercy given to Gentile believers:

11:30

“For as you were once disobedient to God...”

We have to keep remembering that in this passage he is speaking directly to the Gentile element of the Roman church. He reminds them as we all need to be reminded, that we are products of mercy. We are not in the church, if we are truly saved members of that church, because we were somehow better than the Jews who gave up their standing. We are here by mercy. We were seriously disobedient. To list all the sins that Gentile Christians once committed would cause a universal blush to come to the church. We were awful. Liars. Idolaters. Adulterers. Perverts. Murderers. Dope fiends. Alcoholics. Don't forget it, proud Gentile Christian.

“yet have now obtained mercy,”

Though you did all those bad things, God chose to call you to Himself. You are saved in spite of your sin, not because of your great character. You were born in sin, bound for Hell. But God showed you mercy,

“through their disobedience.”

This is the point he has been trying to make throughout this passage. Somehow in the workings of God's heart, He chose to harden Israel, in order to make way for the rest of the family to come in. Formerly we were shut out. God had called the Jewish people to Himself, and with only a very few exceptions, that was the Kingdom. But Jews weren't interested. And you were. So come on in, Gentiles.

So as it is true that disobedient Gentiles get to be saved through disobedient Jews, there is another truth that lights up at the same time:

11:31

“even so these also have now been disobedient...”

The Jews, as every Gentile Christian of that day knew, continue in their hardness and even come against the church of God. But look at this:

“that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.”

Glorious thought. Gentiles are making Jews jealous. And curious. And seeking. Even in this church at Rome there are Jewish believers. They have seen the work that God is able to do in a repentant heart, even if it is a Gentile heart! They want to be saved. And God saves them too. God shows mercy on a Gentile, and a Jew gets saved!

Then the thought that sends Paul into a four-verse rhapsody. Verse 32.

11:32

“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.”

Nothing new here. But seen in this little capsule it is shocking. NKJV has “committed.” KJV has “concluded.” Neither word seems to say it all. The interlinear text based on the most rigid translation of the Textus Receptus says “shut up together.” God has shut up together all in disobedience. There is no “them” in the text. Just “all.” *Soongklio* is the Greek. “To shut together in a common subjection to,” or simply “to include.” When I place all my Romans lessons into one binder, that’s *soongklio*.

Galatians 3:22 is another place Paul uses this word: The Scripture has included all under sin. Like my Romans files in my Romans binder, the human file is all shut up in a binder called sin. But in the next verse of Galatians, the latter part of the verse, Paul says that although the law kept us under guard, we who are saved were shut up, included, filed for the faith that was to come.

That’s all a picture of the election that Paul has been preaching in this chapter. God sees a people. He shuts them up in their disobedience, with the law standing over the cell as a guard. Then He takes that people out of the disobedience “holding place” and brings them into the new room of

mercy and salvation. Same group. Filed away under sin but only so they could be displayed openly to all as products of His marvelous grace.

That's what made Paul so happy. Who could think of such an intricate plan? Give these people liberty to sin themselves into eternal lostness, let them know they are lost forever. Then through grace call these wretches to Himself and lock them into His arms forever.

11:33

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Try to imagine piles and piles of gold and silver and diamonds, rising endlessly into the heavens. And as you jump into that pile and dig deeper and deeper into it, you realize that there is no end. Such depth! Such wealth!

Wisdom and knowledge.

The wisdom of the plan. How do you take sinners who deserve hell and turn them into saints that through Christ deserve Heaven? How do you lock all these prisoners up in one room and tell them they must be lost forever in one breath, then include them in your eternal program of bliss and joy?

What kind of knowledge is necessary for this plan? You must know specifically who you have in mind. You must order their lives in such a way that they will hear the Gospel and accept it. You must know all the specifics of the life of the Son Who will come to die for these *miserables*, these true *deplorables*. You must arrange His birth, His followers, His betrayer, the right mix in the Sanhedrin, the mind of Pilate, the dying thief at His side to show your mercy even in dying. Details, details, God knows how to put together all these details so His Wise Plan can be carried out.

"How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out."

Literally, unsearchable and untraceable. One cannot examine or ever figure out why God does the things He does. One cannot track down His pathway so as to find Him in any absolute way. We will never catch up to Almighty God. We will never comprehend the smallest part of Who He is or how he thinks and why He acts. Never.

Paul shifts into Isaiah yet again, the Septuagint version, chapter 40, verse 13.

11:34

“ ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord?’ ”

In the Hebrew, NKJV, “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord?” A simple enough question, but how many on earth today think they have pretty much figured out this God thing? That is, they “know the mind of the Lord,” and can tell God a thing or two, they can therefore direct the Spirit. I am not sure why the translators of the Septuagint decided on these variations, but there is a general agreement in the texts.

“ ‘Or who has become His counselor?’ ”

What an absurd thought, perhaps borrowed from Job 36:22, “Who teaches like Him?” or from this same Isaiah passage, “Or as His counselor has taught Him?” Is there a man brazen enough to say to the Lord of creation, Here, sit down a few minutes, let me teach you something? Well, there was Peter, who took the Lord aside one day...

I think of prayers I have heard that are nothing more than news reports, informing God of what is going on in the world, and how God ought to fix it all. Let not your prayers be informative. God knows the entire situation. God knows the best solution for that situation, and the timing for that solution. Yield to His will when you pray. Don’t advise Him or counsel Him. Ask Him with all the intensity of your heart. The fervent fiery prayer of a

person who is living a holy life will register in Heaven, says James. But don't add your own puny wisdom to the mix.

In the context of this passage, who could have advised the Lord as to how to solve the sin problem, and the Kingdom problem, and the salvation problem, and the Jewish issues, and the Gentile situation? Is there anyone who could have figured out what to do, and advised the Lord? David had his Hushai. Moses had his Aaron. And his Joshua. Paul had his Barnabas, and his Silas. Who is the Lord's advisor? Ridiculous idea, says Isaiah and Paul.

Then Paul once more, it seems, borrows from the book of Job, 41:11, in the Lord's final speech to the suffering citizen of the land of Uz:

"Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is mine!"

Or as Paul quotes it:

11:35

" 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' "

The first "Him" is God. Some human is hypothetically seen giving a gift to God, whether money or an idea or some advantage. The second "him" is the person who gave the gift and to whom God now fictitiously is in debt!

God owes no one anything. His are the ideas. His are the riches. His are the plans. His are all the advantages. He owes you and me nothing. And that includes salvation. You were not saved because God owed you something. You were the one in debt, not God. Vile sinful man, get over it. God is not in debt to you.

None of you are responsible for the plan that brought Jews and Gentiles into the Kingdom, says Paul. He thought it all up Himself, from His great reservoir of love.

One final shout of praise, and Paul's dissertation on salvation is finished:

11:36

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

God the Creator, "of Him." God the avenue of blessing, "through Him." God the destination of all creation. It all goes back to Him. It's His. He is to receive the praise for all things.

This verse needs not much in the way of commentary, but much in meditation. It is Paul's way of saying, I have said all I can say about your salvation. May God receive all the glory for all he has done. After this climactic moment, Paul will shift gears altogether, but build on everything He has taught us.

Thus far in Romans, we have learned of the sinfulness of man, all mankind, Jew and Gentile. The need for salvation is spelled out in no uncertain terms.

Then Paul introduces that salvation, through faith in Jesus. He talks of the struggles that come as we differentiate between law and grace, flesh and Spirit.

Then that classic discussion of Israel and her place in the plan of God, along with our own, as Gentiles.

Romans has been, so far, a mini course on theology. A man who wants to think as God thinks can do no better than to start with Romans 1-11.

But thinking is not the only goal. There's a "therefore" in chapter 12, that will take us to the end of the epistle. Because you know and have received this great salvation, then what? Many practical answers to that question will follow.

Here then is Romans, Part II. Living for God.

12:1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren."

To the 21st century. We must replace that word "beseech", since we do not use it any longer. This is Paul's first usage in Romans. He'll use it a couple times more. And over a dozen times in his other letters. The Greek word is in the same family that gives us "Comforter" or "Paraclete." This is not a command word. It is an inviting word. I beg you. I urge you. Please!

As an apostle, Paul had the right to "command". But for the most part, this was not His way. In this he was a true disciple of the Master, Who also has authority, but prefers to stand before His people and say, "Come follow Me."

Paul has shown the Romans the serious mystery of the love and calling of God in Christ through the Gospel that saves from sin and death. He has dealt sin and flesh a death-blow, and lifted up the life in the Spirit. Something follows from all of that. A serious invitation.

"by the mercies of God."

Perhaps better translated as the "compassions" of God. We usually think of those two words, mercy and compassion, in the singular. Perhaps Paul has in mind all the individual times and people where God has shown pity for His own. Multiplied compassions over the centuries and millennia. It is because of this constant pouring out of God's love that Paul feels he has a right to give to the Romans the following invitation.

“that you present your bodies a living sacrifice...”

Bodies? Not spirits and souls? After all that eleven-chapter introduction detailing the needs of my soul and the renewal of my spirit, God only wants my body?

Macarthur suggests here that many people are unproductive in their Christian experience because all they think about is receiving more from God, not about giving more to God. And the thing Paul is asking us to give here, is the very seat of the evil that keeps us spiritually down.

The way humans are constructed, of course, to give the body is to give everything. You cannot give your body without giving the soul and spirit within. In the dualism with which Paul’s readers were familiar, it was possible, so they thought, to offer up the spirit while allowing the body to do what it wanted.

We see it often today. You may have noticed it yourself. You may have had a particularly pleasant time in your daily devotions. All seemed sweetness and light. The Word made sense. The songs were from the heart. You felt that perfect peace in your inner man. You then got up from the place of prayer and got into a squabble with a family member. Instantly the spiritual emotions vanish and the body takes over.

Paul says the body must die. This is not new to the epistle. We just haven’t dealt with it since chapter 6, where he told us we have been crucified with Christ. That old person is dead. Here is a new way of saying it. In your time of devotion, before you re-enter the everyday world, place your entire body, with all its wants and wishes and ways, on an altar, there to be offered as a sacrifice to God. Throughout the day, remember what you did. Whatever the body wants, the selfish desires and the constant appeal to evil, it can’t have now. It’s on the altar. Alive but dead.

“Holy, acceptable to God.”

Let's don't skip over this little word "holy". God wants a holy sacrifice, as prescribed in Scripture. Remember that the Jews could only offer animals that were enumerated by God, and could offer them for particular reasons in a particular way. Even incense had to be offered according to the prescription. We all remember the experimenting of Nadab and Abihu.

So we offer to Holy God what Holy God wants. In the way He wants it. Cain thought he had offered an acceptable sacrifice to God. But by God's standard there was little or no sacrifice involved. Pull some plants out of the garden. No pain involved. Oh, months of planting and cultivating and watering etc. Human effort. Abel saw it differently. An animal he had come to cherish. He had seen it born and grow. It had produced, perhaps, some needed wool. We don't know the specifics, but we know there was pain in the offering of it, and of course the sacrifice itself knew the pain of blood and death. God honored that, as a preview of the ultimate sacrifice He Himself would be giving.

Is your sacrifice holy? When you offer yourself on that altar, are you saying, I will go to Church and read my Bible and give my tithe? Or are you saying, I love you so much I am ready truly to give it all for your sake? Not just my petty selfishness, but my blood. I'm all yours.

The standard translation of "acceptable" probably does not convey in modern English what Paul is saying about this sacrifice. In school, students are given an "acceptable" grade of a C or D to communicate that the student has given the least possible effort to complete the task. The fact that the teacher "accepts" the work is no great glory for the child.

"Well-pleasing" is the better translation. God doesn't desire the minimum requirement. God wants to be happy with what you give. Interestingly, the same apostle uses the word in Philippians 4:18, in the same context, and "well-pleasing" is the translation. In the KJV, the English "acceptable" is in the same sentence, but is translated by the Greek *dektane*.

For God, unlike man, there is no acceptance of an inferior sacrifice. To be accepted by God the sacrifice must be not only living, but holy.

“which is your reasonable service.”

Major differences appear in the translating of these two last words. Let's track down the meanings of the Greek words. The text reads, “intelligent service your” in the Berry interlinear using the Textus Receptus. So where did the modern “spiritual worship” get its basis? Quite a difference between “reasonable service” and “spiritual worship.”

The traditional meaning is that it only makes sense that you give yourself fully to God. The new meaning is a little unclear. The words “spiritual” and “worship” do not seem to go together. A bit redundant?

The Greek for that first word: *logikos*. That seems plain enough on the surface. We get the word “logical” from that word. The word means “rational.” It is derived from “*logos*”, the word. The only other place it is used in the New Testament is in 1 Peter 2:2, where the author speaks of the sincere milk of the word. The phrase “of the word” is *logikos*. Peter tells them to desire the rational, reasonable milk.

Now, how that word got stretched into “spiritual”, I have no clue. The Nestle-Aland text is no different than the Textus Receptus here, so it's not a source problem. The New King James did not correct the English here. It's not an English problem. Clearly, the word should be “reasonable” or “rational” or “logical.” It just makes sense to offer yourself to the Lord, based on everything Paul has said so far.

But wait. Maybe there is a clue in the second word, “service.” Yes, the Greek *latreia* does indeed carry the idea of worship. “Service” is a correct translation, but Strong points out that it is Divine service, or worship, that the word usually points to. Generally speaking, when the word shows up

in the New Testament a few other times, it can be understood in that way.

So the new translators had a problem. *Logikos* is clearly “rational”. *Latreia* is probably “worship”. How to put those two words together? They concluded that they could not, so they changed one of the words. Not the best approach to translation, in my humble opinion.

Here’s how I would combine the two ideas. The verse in question is talking about sacrifice. Sacrifice is indeed Jewish – and Christian – worship. Paul is telling the Romans and us to offer our bodies on God’s altar as the only reasonable logical way to worship God.

There is another element to this offering that he brings forward in verse 2:

12:2

“And do not be conformed to this world...”

Another appeal to the Greek makes Paul say, do not “fashion yourselves” to this world. And “world” is from *aion* or “age”, a time word as opposed to a place word. There is a world system in place, governed by the prince of the power of the air. Jesus called Satan the “prince of this world.” Christians are not world changers. This world cannot change until the return of Christ to set it all in order, with that other “prince” cast out from his rule.

Individuals, sometimes their families, even larger groups, will experience change. But the world as a whole is under the spell of evil. Christians, as part of their logical offering of themselves to God, are not to put on the world’s mask and pretend to be a part of it. Their separation from things evil is to be clear to all around them. We are not to love the world, neither the things in the world, says John. Everything in the world, the desires of your own body, the desires your eyes put before you, the pride of being

someone in this world system... none of this is from the Father. None of this belongs to us.

There is a grievous error being taught among us regarding our relationship to this world. The essence of this new teaching – though it is as old as Satan’s temptation to Jesus in the wilderness – is that Christians are to be conquerors. That is, we are to become the very best in every category of this world. Number one in politics, entertainment, sports. Thus, young Christians are encouraged to “follow their dreams” of worldly success. Of course, when we get to the top, we are to use our new-found influence for Jesus.

It’s called “Dominion” theology. The theory is that by being number one in everything, we will take over this world for Jesus, and hand it to Him when He returns in glory.

The Scriptures talk of just the opposite for the church. Self-denial. Lowliness. Humility. Suffering. Crosses. And here, no conformation to things worldly at all. In fact, Paul goes on,

“but be transformed”

Not conformed. Transformed. Metamorphosed. Changed. The English word “metamorphose” means literally to change into a different physical form, especially by supernatural means. It involves a striking change of appearance or character.

“Transform” is about as different from “conform” as “change” is to “imitate.” Secret disciples take notice. If you look like the world, talk like the world, act like the world, you are probably the world, and just fooling yourself on Sunday mornings. Granted, there are true believers who try to fool the world during the week, but more than likely it is the other way around.

So how is this transformation to take place? It's all well and good to say they I should stop looking like the world, but how can I stop that? I'm a human. I go to work. I come home. I take care of a family. How am I to be so different.

Well, as a man thinks, so he is. Paul says we are to be transformed in our thinking processes,

“by the renewing of your mind.”

Two thoughts cannot occupy the same place at the same time in your brain. To get one thought out, you bring another thought in. We renew our mind in a number of ways, the main one being by allowing God's thoughts through the Scriptures to push out our thoughts. Paul mentions this in Colossians 3:16:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” That happens when we read the Scripture. He goes on to add: “teaching and admonishing one another.” Bible lessons? Personal exhortations? But look at the method Paul suggests: “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” So when we come together, we need to be sure to have a good collection of the Psalms, of great poems set to music, and even songs that the Spirit can give spontaneously. The Word of God is in all these things, and will push out the music of this world, little by little.

Remember that minds can be renewed in the old ways too. That is, if you keep bringing up those worldly songs, they will get a new life, and strangle your thirst for the new. Keep allowing the new in, and simply say “No entrance allowed” when the old shows up at your mind's door.

I have caught myself often in the morning singing a worldly song from my distant past. I immediately force that song out by singing a new song. Remember that it is not just a matter of fighting against the old, it is constantly introducing the new.

“that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Get your mind renewed, thinking God’s thoughts, through the Word, so that... so that what?

The word is *dokimadzo*. It means to “test” or “approve”, and that is why some of the newer translations have it that way. “Discern” is used at times also. It is used in a parable of Jesus, where an excuse-giver says to the one inviting him to a marriage feast, “I am going to prove these new oxen I have bought.” Test. Check them out. See if they do what the owner said they would do. In other places where “prove” is used in the epistles, this idea of testing will substitute for it.

This is not a matter of scientifically proving, as we use the word, that something is true. We know that the will of God, when we find it, is good and holy. We are not lending authority to God’s will. We are testing the various possibilities that come into our life to see if they match up with the Scriptures. The mind renewed by the Spirit-breathed Word is so essential in our culture today, where a thousand heresies float around the church and few there be who recognize them.

The world and the church are sending out signals, attractions, ideas, philosophies, invitations. Only a person whose mind is daily being renewed by God’s truth will know what to do with all of them.

As to “good” and “acceptable” and “perfect”, I fear that the standard interpretation will not do, namely, that there are levels of quality when it comes to the will of God for your life. There is a “good”, like a C+. And an acceptable, like a B, and a perfect, the A+. Rather, I believe that Paul is saying the same thing three different ways.

Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit. It is perfect goodness. We learned in verse 1 that “acceptable” is not the same as our own “acceptable”, as in the schoolteacher who lets pass some otherwise mediocre work. Pass/fail

is the standard of Heaven. If you fail, you may get to try again, but you did fail. The will of God in a situation is either accepted in Heaven, or not.

When you are trying to discern, Is this God, you ask, "Is it good? Will God accept it as it is? Is it perfect in every way?" If you are not sure that it can pass that test, you wait until it can. How many bad marriages, wrong occupations, sad financial decisions, would be stopped if people would allow their renewed mind to block all bad, unacceptable, imperfect ideas from taking hold in their brains. How many of us stop at the word "good", and say, Yes, that's a good thing! I'll do it! Not realizing that the very word "good" comes from "God."

So God, in response to all Paul has taught us in Romans, is now asking us to make a complete sacrifice of our body and mind, using Word-driven discernment to live a step-by-step decision-by-decision holy life.

His reasoning? Read on.

12:3

"For I say, through the grace given to me."

Careful now. This is not Paul talking. God's grace is on this man, speaking through him to us. And who is the "us"?

"to everyone who is among you."

He has definitely left off talking to Gentiles about Jews and to Jews about themselves and Gentiles. Everyone listen up. Universal message coming next:

"not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..."

Why is this warning suddenly in the text? it is not new. A quick scan of chapters 1-11 will produce the same message. We are all included in sin.

Jews have fallen away. Gentiles have come in but can lose their place in the tree if they are not truly born again. He's been sounding the alarm for the whole letter. And he realizes that the godly advice he has just given in the first two verses, may not be heeded. You mean, after all this, Paul, after your telling us of the great salvation in Jesus, that it's still not a slam-dunk entrance into heaven?

Any person who feels he is of the elect is going to be tempted to put it in neutral and glide heavenward with no obstructions. Paul now shares with Rome and us the means by which God guides His elect to the destination: Letters like Paul's. Troubles. Temptations allowed.

There is a "highness" in our thought life that is acceptable, it seems to me through these words. God Himself is my Father. Not a bad start. The Lord of all the earth, Jesus, is my brother. The meek shall inherit the earth. It is good to harbor those sorts of thoughts. But there is a highness that is not becoming of a Christian. As, God is my father, what's wrong with you? Jesus is my brother, why haven't you accepted Him? The meek shall inherit the earth. And I am very meek...

You see how truths can develop into wrong thoughts. Paul would keep us from such.

"but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

Think seriously. Think in terms of the reality of the revelation God has given to his church. Let not imagination or self, enter into the truth revealed by God.

As he enters into a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit, we keep in mind how the chapter began. Total offering of body and mind to Christ. Total conforming by a renewed mind. No connection to the world system. Always discerning the will of God for you. No pride involved in this, but contentment with what God has given.

Now, how does the “measure of faith” follow these warnings, and precede the talk of gifts? Paul has just given a blanket observation about total submission to Christ. But he now says that though our offering must be total, the manifestation of God’s response is not total to each individual. No one Christian has it all. He gives it all, but he must in humility realize that what he will offer to the body of Christ after that is a partial measure.

Though there are believers that seem to have more gifts than others, there is no self-sufficient believer. A man or woman who has surrendered all to Christ sometimes develops an independent spirit. He thinks he can make it alone. He is even lifted up to pride by his great sacrifice of himself to Jesus and His mission. Paul says, Not so fast. You only have a measure of faith. You don’t have all faith for all the work that needs to be done. So think soberly. Don’t get carried away with your own worthiness, and don’t get discouraged when you find you are limited.

I lift from John MacArthur’s commentary a fictitious article that he himself lifted from a Springfield, Oregon public school newsletter of many years ago:

“Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school. [may not have been the brightest idea. bf]

“They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

“The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he became only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that- except the duck.

“The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

“The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed “charley horses” from over-exertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

“The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing classes he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there...”

We’re all different. We all have a measure of faith to do this or that. I don’t have your measure, you do not have mine. Let’s be sober, realistic, about what God has given us. Paul enlarges on this idea in the next five verses.

12:4

“For as we have many members in one body...”

God has dealt to every man a particular measure of ability to believe and to receive from God. His illustration: the human body. God has dealt to every member of our body a measure of functioning, capability, usefulness. We know that Paul deals with this issue even more in the next book of the Bible. 1 Corinthians 12:12 ff reads like this:

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” In that passage is where he makes the humorous suggestions that it would be preposterous to think of the body as just one member, for example, a

hand, an ear, an eye. “Indeed”, he says, “ there are many members, but one body.”

So here in Romans,

“but all the members do not have the same function,”

Should be an obvious truth, but how many church members that you know either have no seeming function in the church at all, or are trying to do everyone’s job? How many pastors have been told in one way or another, “Look, we pay you a handsome salary. We expect you to produce. When something needs to be done, either you do it, or we will hire other people to assist you.”

Hence we come up with the professional ministry. The clergy-laity split. Never intended by God. In a true church, there is enough giftedness to get every job done. The pastor is free to minister in his own giftings, and the people are released into their own. I know from experience how boring it can be to go to a church where there is seemingly nothing for me to do. People who stay in churches like that, never exercising their God-given gift, often stay for the wrong reasons. Perhaps family is coercing them. Perhaps business deals are available. Perhaps there are immoral reasons. Maybe just a sense of duty.

True pastors will strive often to direct their people into praying for and receiving and using their giftedness. The church grows and glows when the gifts of God are in operation.

12:5

“so we, being many, are one body in Christ,”

The struggle for unity yet diversity is an ongoing challenge in any congregation of Christians. Top-down dictator-style methods may bring a visible unity, but this is a church of bondage. See Jesus’ own style of

shepherding His little flock. Of course there was authority. Of course there was clear direction. But no force feeding. Jesus would tell a parable and the disciples would ask questions and he would answer them. Jesus would work a miracle, then ask them to try it. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes not. Patience. Kindness. A little push, but not a shove. When the eleven were set free, see the variations in their ministrations and geographical dispersal. No cookie-cutter. God had a place and a gift for all of them.

So we are not to slavishly copy the one before us except in holiness and love. We are not to try to exercise the gifts of the leader but seek earnestly the best gifts he has for us. And though we are many, somehow He takes all of our differences and makes them one effective move of God in a church and community. It's the only way to fly.

So we are connected to Christ through the Spirit...

“and individually members of one another.”

It is a joy in our private times to realize our connection to Jesus. Prayer. The Word. There can develop a beautiful communication. But the outflow of all this is that we are also connected to every true believer in Jesus, who has the same Spirit of God.

We tend to recognize the true ones. It is probably not fair to say that those with whom we have the greatest difficulty in the church are not true members of the Body, but there may be some truth in that. Association in Christ cannot be forced.

Often our gifts differ so radically that we don't recognize a true brother. At other times there is severe immaturity in one or the other or both. But it is also quite possible that a mature believer who has repeated failure in fellowship with a certain church member, may have discovered one of the branches that is not really a connected one. It is not time to panic, but to keep living the Spirit-filled life before that person. Things can change.

True discernment needs to be exercised if the unsaved church member wants some sort of bonding in a common cause or project. “Be not unequally yoked...” whether in marriage or business or ministry, applies here. It would severely hurt the cause of Christ for a true believer to unite with one who has never known Christ and who therefore participates freely in this world’s ways.

Unthinking romances which turn into disastrous marriages are just one example. Be sure that your intended knows Jesus as you do, or only trouble is ahead.

We are members one of another. I belong to you and you to me. Love is the glue that keeps the true ones together and the false ones – perhaps – brought in later.

12:6

“having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...”

Suddenly we are in a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit. The list about to unfold differs from the more popular one in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, letting us know that neither gift is exhaustive. Even the combination of the two lists will not provide everything that the Spirit does in a believer’s life.

We offer the familiar cautions in dealing with gifts. Gifts are poured out, not developed from within. They are not fruit. They do not necessarily suggest that the owner of the gift is truly spiritual, though these are called spiritual gifts. The gifts are spiritual whether the person is or not.

The discussion begins in verse 3, which speaks of a measure of faith given to all. Here it is called “grace.” Whatever it is called, it is seen as a donation from Heaven, not a work of the flesh. These gifts are things that

only God can do in a person's life, though if not careful, the person will begin to think that he just does this naturally. No. It's from God.

Interesting to note that "gifts" and "grace" are nearly the same word. We have gifts, plural, because of the gift, singular. We have various graces, plural, because of the grace, singular. Do we need to say anything further to convince us that whatever comes upon us is underserved favor from God? No boasting allowed!

One can only wonder what He is looking at when He sees some of those who stand before us claiming such giftedness.

The clause, "let us use them" is not in the original. I'll explain this in the next section. The rest of the verse needs some translation explanation, for sure: From the NKJV,

" if prophecy let us prophesy in proportion to our faith."

And from the KJV

"whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith."

Both good translations, but both add words to the original to help clarify what is being said. Side note: Adding to the original can be an acceptable form of translation, but always needs to be dealt with carefully if in the hands of the wrong person.

The italicized words in the above quotes are simply not in the Greek. Here is the Greek, translated into English word for word:

"whether prophecy – according to the proportion of faith."

So the entire thought runs like this: Our gifts are different due to God's grace in giving them. Prophecy, for example will be given in proportion to

the faith we have. The idea of using that gift has been added. Rather, the receiving of it seems to be the focus here.

God gives different people different amounts of faith to believe for different amounts of the prophetic word, which word, to us, seems to be encapsulated in Scripture.

Absent from the book of Romans, written, we believe, a little later than 1 Corinthians, is a discussion of tongues. We will gladly accept that omission, not wanting to delve into all the issues regarding glossolalia. But prophecy in the New Testament context, is no less a miracle than tongues or healing. God gives it. That makes it Divine. It is not from man.

Does prophecy exist today? Some will say, That depends on how you define it. True enough. Probably better to define it many ways, and still say, Yes?

That is, God brings to the preacher or evangelist or Christian worker, a Word, today that means a Scripture, a teaching from the Word already given. That Word goes from “prophet” to whoever needs to hear it, and produces life.

Nothing involved here. God speaks. He speaks through His Word. He brings that Word to our remembrance as needed. Is that not prophecy?

As for predictive prophecy – and there are several kinds of prophecy- Paul said it: They will fail. Most that we hear of today do fail. We are not concerned with the men who keep mouthing these false prophecies. They will come to their reward. What we do need to do is listen for a possible true one. Does God still know the future? Can He reveal it to men? Is there a reason why He would not?

We understand the teaching of the temporary nature of the gifts. It is sensible. But it is very hard to defend Biblically. Perhaps better to simply apply God’s rules to those who claim the gift of prophecy, turn on some

discernment, rebuke the false ones, and see if God really does do today what He always did. But not at every service of every church!

One of the serious problems in the charismatic movement today is that so-called gifts of prophecy are not regulated in any way. Once there is a “thus saith the Lord,” people tremble rather than discern. And the church is often deceived.

Let’s continue in this passage as though everything Paul is talking about is for us.

12:7

“Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering...”

Kjv: “Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering.”

Once more the Greek is instructive here. It simply reads, “Or service, in service. Notice how many words both versions have to add to try to explain Paul. Not necessary.

We are all different, says Paul. Some have been given prophecy with a matching gift of faith. Some have been given a gift of service, for serving.

The word “ministry” is a valid translation but conjures up pictures of an official “clergy” doing the work of the people. The word is simply service. God gives to some a special ability to serve others. Serve.

“he who teaches, in teaching.”

The same basic structure is used here, except that an article is added to suggest who is doing the teaching. You’ve been given a gift of teaching? Then teach.

12:8

“he who exhorts, in exhortation.”

There are those who give out the truths of Scripture. They are teachers. But there are others who encourage the brethren to follow those teachings. They are encouragers. The word comes from the same root as does “Paraclete”, a name for the Holy Spirit. They “call alongside”. They can do this individually or before a group.

Some churches have had persons set aside in the church formally as “exhorters” based on this passage. Though this may be carrying things a bit too far, some of us can remember the pastor calling up this or that person to give a “word” of exhortation. The message of the exhorter is of a different flavor than the standard “sermon”. It is practical and personal and invitational. A true gift.

Pastors can have this gift often. The apostles exercised it, says MacArthur, as told in Acts 14:21-22: “they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith...” That’s exhortation.

But as I said above, it is also possible for a believer to exhort one other believer, as seems to be encouraged in Hebrews 10:24-25, “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...”

The last time you encouraged a brother or sister to continue on with Jesus and do the right thing, you were exercising the gift of exhortation. Perhaps you need to think in terms of developing that gift, for it is sorely needed in these discouraging days.

“he who gives, with liberality.”

The apostle now feels led to add a suggestion along with the gifts. Prophesying, serving, teaching, exhorting are what they are. But in the Jewish mindset, and ours too, giving has some baggage attached to it.

People give out of duty. People give with a calculator out along with their wallet. People give, as did the Pharisees, to impress. They sounded a trumpet before them. And then gave what the law required.

Not so with us. The man or woman full of the Spirit of God gives freely. The word for giving here is also translated “sharing” elsewhere. It’s not the giving of payment, which is not giving to begin with. It is the giving of caring and compassion. It rises from inside and controls the fingers which are counting out the money.

So how do we arrive at the translation “liberality” when the KJV says “simplicity”? I have shown you that in the context of the word for giving, how this can be. Interestingly enough, Paul uses the same word in 2 Corinthians 8:2, talking of the sacrifices the Macedonians made in their giving. He speaks of the riches of their liberality.

So the KJV translators would have to tell us why they chose one in one place and one in the other. Context.

But can you just change a word because the original doesn’t seem to make sense? It does make sense: The word *haplotace* in the Greek means “singleness.” Strong goes on to explain that therefore the idea of “sincerity” can be extracted. Without self-seeking. In other words, generosity or liberality. Sometimes we need to examine a word a little more deeply to see why translators do what they do.

“He who leads, with diligence.”

The gift is real and valuable, but is to be handled well, as all gifts. If someone were to make a present to you of a new car, it would not stay new and beautiful very long if you mistreated it, did not maintain it, and clean it. Gifts need care.

Leadership of any kind in the church needs this care. All true leaders are gifted by God to lead. But not all leaders are careful about how they use

their gift. One would think Paul would ask the Roman church leaders to lead with *authority*. The KJV uses “rule” instead of lead. Unfortunately, many church leaders do indeed see themselves as little kings. They are called to lead but not to lord. To feed, not to force.

But they are not called here to lead with power, but to lead with diligence. The original here is “speed.” Haste. When the job calls for action, laziness and procrastination won’t work. Eagerness. Earnestness. Discipline. Determination to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. These speedy folks, as long as they act in wisdom and with counsel, are the best leaders. We’ve all seen the other kind. Projects drag on and on or are never even begun, though the need is obvious. Hungry sheep are left hungry and fed leftovers from Sunday to Sunday.

If God has given you the opportunity to lead in His church, whatever the size of your domain, get to it. Now.

“he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

All of God’s people are called to share the word of God with someone, to teach it to someone, to exhort someone. All of us are called of God to give, to lead. But there are individuals among us that show us what those qualities look like by having a superabundant supply of one or the other.

So it is with mercy. Surely God has called all of His own to be merciful to others. Oh how the world needs mercy, and the church too. Compassion. Understanding. Forgiveness. A true game-changer in a person’s life. You have failed, but God’s mercy does not fail. You have disappointed, but God understands.

There are those who have mercy in great abundance. One could see this as a fruit that we all must develop, but in some it is so abundant as to be obviously a gift, as in this context. But Paul points out that even a gift of mercy needs to be guarded with care and used properly. As a man who

has leadership must be diligent in its use, so one with mercy must remember to be cheerful.

How could mercy and compassion not be cheerful? Right away we understand that mercy is not just a feeling one gets. Not just some tears shed. Mercy is action. God's mercy sent Jesus to die. Surely He cried over us and felt for us deeply. But the feelings without the actions would have left us lost.

Merciful people are always wanting to get God's love to those who need it. That's a tall order, as the need is overwhelming. Paul warns us here not to extend mercy actions beyond the point where they can be given with feeling. A dutiful visit to the prison will not communicate God's love to the prisoners very readily without a cheerful attitude. You may be thanked for coming, but also cause relief when you leave. Actions plus feeling. That's mercy plus cheerfulness about it.

Paul now leaves the area of specific gifts to go to those qualities that the Spirit desires to create in the church at large. The list is a bit intimidating and probably will need to be read often by the erstwhile believer. It is a description, like Jesus' sermon on the mount, of what the Christian life – Kingdom life – ought to look like. Look at it as a checklist, and see just where you are in your Christian walk.

12:9

“Let love be without hypocrisy...”

Oh my. The most difficult first? How is hypocrisy sometimes a part of your love? KJV calls hypocrisy, “dissimulation.” That doesn't help much. But it does mean about the same as “hypocrisy.” Better go back to the Greek again. Only three words there, and one of them is the feminine article. Simply: “the love unfeigned.”

Seems like this may be at the end of the list of spiritual gifts. Give, with liberality, lead with diligence, show mercy with cheerfulness, the love unfeigned.

Sincere love. Love not put on, for the sake of those around you. The real deal. Most of us know what it means to be “loved” by the manipulator. Always willing to do nice things for us, but always with a price attached. They expect something in return, usually immediately. Or they expect recognition by you or the leaders of the church or society.

Fake lovers are on the take. They have no intention of sacrificing for you, truly caring about you. They are nice and make promises, and do the minimums, but their love is feigned. It is an act. They know how to turn it on and turn it off.

That’s not for the Christian.

“Abhor what is evil...”

“Abhor” is a strong word in English. It’s related to horror. Something that makes one shudder to think of it. No better in the Greek *apostugeo*. To detest utterly. Beyond dislike or even hate. This is the ultimate in rejection.

Is that a picture of the American/Western church? Is that a picture of your own life? Do you abhor what sent Jesus to a cross? Do you abhor those blockades to your holiness? Do you detest every idol lifted up above the precious Head of Jesus Christ your loving Savior? To love Jesus is to abhor that which is not of Jesus.

What is the opposite of the abhorrence of evil?

“Cling to what is good.”

Kollao, from a word that means “glue”. Literally, stick to. The old English “cleave” does not speak to us today, but the NKJV “cling” doesn’t tell the whole story either. This is a relationship that is bound fast. You are glued into place to everything good.

When good shows up in a room, there you are right next to it. When a verse in the Bible speaks of your responsibility in Christ, you are fastened to that directive. Not out of law or fear any longer. No, you love God, and want to please Him, and the directives in Scripture tell you how that can be done.

You are fastened to good preaching and holy people and edifying music. You’re not just holding on with one or two hands. You are fastened to goodness, wherever you see it.

Some will ask, how can I always know the difference between good and evil? That, we have already answered in verse 2. Listen to the apostles and prophets who gave us the very word of God. Let your mind be fed daily with the truths of these men filled with the Holy Spirit.

After a while, evil will be so clear to you when you see it. You will know. And when you know, Paul says, make your preference clear. Detest evil. Be glued to good. Be extreme in your love and in your hatred.

12:10

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love...”

Words we skip over lightly, thinking we understand. “Kindly affectionate” is one word in the original and has to do with family relationship. Fond of family. Caring deeply for family and friend.

Commands like this may be more difficult for some than any of the deep theological truths we were uncovering in the first eleven chapters. There are many that God has saved, in the church, who come from perfectly

awful families. There is no other way to express it. The only perfection their family ever reached was the perfection of awfulness. No love. No care. No respect.

Yet Paul tells these people along with all the church, to have the affection of a family member toward those new family members in the Family of Christ.

There are churches that seem to be this way. You enter and are smothered with hugs and handshakes, even kisses in some culture. So much so that you are worried about how to react, though you love the attention.

Though some may over-do it, this is far more to be desired than the iceberg church where you enter, march to your place, are handed a piece of paper, and are expected to sit rigidly for the next hour or so watching a performance on a stage yards away, all the while viewing the back of the heads of several other of the audience.

The family-deprived brother or sister needs to know, affection is normal. It is good. You may cringe for a while if you never had it at home, but you'll get used to it, and come to miss it when you visit the church of the Frigidaire.

Of course, Paul is not just talking about a church meeting here. This is a lifestyle. Whether giving a hug or writing a check or making a visit to a hospital, we Christians are one family, and we truly have a deep family feeling for everyone who is filled with the Spirit of God.

“... in honor giving preference to one another;”

The word means to show deference. What does that mean? It means to honor another person as though they were superior to you. Not because they are in a church or world office. Not because they are rich, or famous.

Whoever they are, they are better than me, is what I am to believe about everyone.

Paul could call himself the chief of sinners in all honesty. He truly believed it. The more you get to know yourself, and may God grant you many years to do so, the more you will see the stinking nature of your character. The foolish decisions. The bad choices of friends. The wasted time. The lost opportunities. The caving in to the flesh. The lies you believed about yourself. Oh, you will be shouting to Paul, How dare you think you are the chief! Move over. That's my place!

Believing that about yourself makes it easy for you to "prefer" or defer to, others. Suddenly their star will rise as yours goes down.

There is of course a hidden danger in taking this too far. Shouting at each other about who is the lowest will not do. And praising others so highly as to make them forget that they must act like you are acting, that's not wise either. But a basic honor and respect for others that recognizes God's place for them in His plan, just as He made a place for you, it's a healthy thing.

12:11

"Not lagging in diligence..."

What he has said to leaders already he now brings forward for the entire Body: Be diligent. When you are given an assignment, get on it. Take it seriously. Ecclesiastes 9:10 tells us, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might!" The writer of Hebrews expands it a little more for us:

"...we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."
(Hebrews 6:11-12, NASB)

“fervent in spirit...”

Boiling hot. Burning with God’s passion for souls, for holiness, for the love of God. Apollos is said to be an example of this behavior as he went from place to place preaching fervently the truth he knew. When he was corrected in his doctrine (Acts 18:25) we can only imagine how much more fervor was added.

We have heard often that though it was God who lit the fire in the temple, it was the priests who were commissioned to keep that fire burning. Easy to say. But all of us know that God’s grace has had to reach us more than once to re-kindle the flame.

It is the fervent prayer of a righteous man that gets through to the Heavenly places. (James 5:16). Paul’s prayers were of this variety. (Colossians 4:12) Fervent love is enjoined on us by the apostle Peter (1 Peter 1:22).

You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire, was the promise. We know what happened at Pentecost. The tongues of fire. Were they the entire fulfillment of that prophecy, or is there a fire that burns within all the true people of God, that needs to be stoked and watched over and guarded carefully so as not to go out or even lessen?

Where is your fire today? Can you think of a time when you had more than you do now? Jesus talks about losing our first love as a possibility. Is that not, our first fire?

You see again how these verses are not theologically difficult to understand, as in prior portions of Romans. But they are so difficult to live. No hypocrisy. No evil. Affection for all. Others better than me. Constant diligence. Constant fire. Who is capable of this without God’s grace constantly on us?

“Serving the Lord...”

It is good to be reminded in this long list of activities that our service in it all is not to ourselves or to other humans, but to the Lord. A fervent spirit, a zealous attitude, can be self-serving. A diligent person can use his diligence to please others and to be advanced by man. Even those who seem to prefer others above themselves can allow that humility to turn into something fleshly that honors me.

Our nature is corrupt. We start out wanting to serve the Lord, but our flesh sees what we are doing and arrests our progress by turning everything away from Heaven to earth and self. We are not of those who serve idols. We serve the Lord. Every ministry you have been entrusted with is to be directed only toward the Lord and of the Lord you will receive the reward for that service. Any service that was turned into man-pleasing or self-pleasing will be burned up and disregarded. A total waste of time.

Serve the Lord.

12:12

“Rejoicing in hope...”

Do you hope to be caught up one day to be with the Lord, whether from the grave or from your present location? Be happy about that. Do you expect to hear a “Well done” from Jesus on that day? Is that your hope? Be excited about it. Do you fully believe that the difficulties you experience in your body, with your family, in your ministry, will one day be taken from you, and that you will have a new body, new surroundings, peace forever? Rejoice. Get happy.

We all know that “hope” is one of the three mainstays of the Christian life. It should go without saying that a person whose hope is Heaven should be constantly rejoicing over that. But that is not the case. Paul

reminds us that if we truly have the hope of eternal life, we ought to be happy about it!

“Patient in tribulation...”

Is there any among us who does not understand this directive? As you and the spirit in you look into the mirror of God’s Word through the apostle, does a patient person look back at you? Patience of any kind at any time is worth having. And it is best to cultivate it when things are going well. But Paul kicks it up a notch here. What about when things are not going well? How quickly do the complaints start when things go wrong?

Even ruffling of the feathers is not Paul’s subject. In fact, to be perfectly accurate, typical patience is not the subject either. Rather, endurance or perseverance. Endurance when the tribulation comes. Sometimes translated persecution, or trouble, this word essentially means “pressure.” That covers it all, doesn’t it?

The water is room temperature, then warm, then hot, then boiling. When do you jump out of the water and say, “Enough!” How much pressure can you bear before your endurance wears out? It’s a serious question, the answer to which in different parts of the church world is substantially varied. What is your answer? What is mine? Are we training ourselves, as the weight-lifter, to bear more and more pressure? Certainly the Master trainer has this in mind as troubles come your way.

He will never give us more than we can bear, but He does expect us to lift the burden He has given to us, patiently, even thankfully. For we know there is reward in so doing.

“Continuing steadfastly in prayer...”

Again easy to understand. The “how often” is not addressed here. The content of your prayers or their fervency is not mentioned. Rather, the discipline. Steadfastly. Whatever level you have attained, don’t go

backwards. Stay with it. Certainly daily. Certainly the basics of the Lord's prayer, if not the actual words. Praise. Submission. Petition. Confession. Forgiveness. Deliverance from evil.

And the people you have begun to pray for, stay with it. Do you know if there are others praying for them? Is their name heard in heaven at any time of the day besides your time of prayer?

And the breakthrough or even miracle that you feel you must have or die? Keep praying until He stops you. He knows how to do that. Be steadfast. The KJV "instant" is a bit archaic here, hence the NKJV's rendering of steadfast. The word has to do with earnestness towards something, implying that you will keep at it until it is done.

Don't give up. Keep praying.

12:13

"Distributing to the needs of the saints."

Brings us back to verse 8, "he who gives, with liberality." But that command is general. This one is specific. Unfortunately, giving today involves salaries, building programs, building upkeep, musical equipment with its outrageous prices, expenditures for youth programs geared to keeping the young attracted to church by any means necessary.

The early church had a shorter shopping list. Sure, you could honor a leader with necessary funding. Then there was the sending of missionaries. But the "needs of the saints" were a top priority. Sickness. Food. Clothing. The basics of life in a pre-insurance, pre Social Security world. The aged needed regular help. Those unable to work, truly unable, had to be cared for. The family was to care for its own when possible, but when not, the church was there.

The word for distributing or better, contributing, carries with it the idea of fellowship. It was an outward sharing, not a downward “charity” that fostered guilt or assumed control. The church is to look at itself as one body, and wherever that body has a need, those able to meet it are required to do so.

We can be thankful for government assistance in a nation like ours, but often the church is robbed of its most important duty and privilege: meeting the saints’ needs.

“given to hospitality.”

Are we still talking about gifts of the Spirit, or the miraculous manifestations of God among His people? Is hospitality truly one of the marks of the godly? Paul says so. The Christian experience is full-orbed. It involves every aspect of the human condition.

We’ve all done it: sent friends, even family, to the nearest motel. Better to pay the money than deal with the trouble. What is so precious about our time and property that we cannot take in one who is traveling and needs what we have?

“Pursuing the love of strangers” is the Greek here. And remember the injunction added by the writer of Hebrews: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (NASB) The story of course points to Abraham’s visitors in the Genesis account.

But where else does it point? That *is* the point! We don’t know where else. Not that entertaining angels is our goal. Entertaining humans is the idea. But in the process of being obedient to this practice, God finds a way to bless us as well as the one being housed.

12:14

“Bless those who persecute you...”

Most of Paul’s long list applies to the brothers and sisters, and God Himself. This one involves those who not only are unbelievers, but who are hostile to us.

Already the first-century church has developed a list of persecutors. The unbelieving Jews were first on that list. But as in their dealings with Jesus, they could often enlist the help of the Roman government of the day. And the Romans had their own issues with Christians, who refused to bow to their Emperor as god. Heretics within and without added to the problem.

The same list has carried down to our own day. False religion, government, Christian heretics, continue to assault the church of God, though without lasting damage.

The response of God’s people has been in defiance of Paul’s clear teaching here. Believers have raised swords against their enemies, as in the Medieval church. They have published books against them, as in the Reformation days. They have avoided them, cut them off, excommunicated them, rightly or wrongly. They have hated them.

But Jesus’ command was to love our enemies, and Paul adds a practical way of showing that love, namely, blessing them!

What does a blessing on an enemy look like? They are trying to steal from you. You give them what they are trying to steal, and add more. Didn’t Jesus advocate that? They demand something, you give more than they ask, and shock them.

When they teach falsely, you teach the truth, but in love, with a totally different attitude than they have, showing you have a totally different Master.

When they raise a whip against you, you patiently bear it, then pray for them. Before they kill you, you are lovingly sharing the way of salvation to all who will hear.

Many early Christians, and some in our world today, have behaved in this manner. They are pleasing to God, and we must follow them. Our hatred and fighting proves nothing except that we are no better off than they are. Many are the testimonies of men who later gave their life to Christ when they saw the love and forgiveness in the face and actions and words of an abused Christian.

Verse 19-21 cover this topic in greater detail. It is something Christians need to learn well.

But Paul does not end his thought there. He tells them a second time,

“Bless” then adds “and do not curse.”

Why do you think he felt led to repeat himself with this added notion? For effect? Possibly. Could it be also that some Christians might feel their duty to the unbelieving persecutor was done after they said something like “God bless you!” Could it be that after their blessing many Christians would go on to seek vengeance? To use the arm of flesh against the wiles of the devil? To pull out the knife or gun and deal with God’s enemies?

I think this is the lot of many of us. We pray for these folks. But when they come against us, we use every excuse possible to hurt them. “How dare they come against a child of God!” “I must protect my life so my family will not be bereaved!” “Jesus allowed swords among his first disciples.” “I am set for the defense of the Gospel!” And a host of other meaningless fronts for our cowardice.

Paul says bless. And keep on blessing! Don’t turn the blessing into a curse later. God will take care of them, His way, His time.

12:15

“Rejoice with those who rejoice...”

Little children don't like losing. Even though it is a sibling that has defeated them in a game or sport, the losing child often cannot find it in his heart to reach out and congratulate. God's kids have a similar malady that the apostle would have us overcome. When one of the brothers and sisters of the Lord is exulting in praise over a recent victory, get happy with them.

Sounds easy. It isn't always. Things come our way that put us in a negative mode. How can I be happy when I have just lost in life?

Of course, condemnation is not meant to be engendered here. What if two Christians are on opposite poles of the joy scale and both try to obey Paul in this directive and his next one. Should I stop my tears to laugh with you or should you stop your laughter to cry with me?

Nevertheless, the injunction remains. When at all possible, celebrate when a happy chord is played in someone else's life. It makes the joy even greater when it is shared.

On the other hand,

“weep with those who weep.”

This may present the most difficult challenge, especially if life has been going pretty well. Suddenly I am to put on the mourner's face and commiserate with my brother or sister.

Macarthur points out here that we should not only weep with those who are weeping, but, like Jesus praying over Jerusalem, we should weep for those who ought to be weeping but are not. A true test of Christian character it is, to put off the garments of joy and rejoicing, and take upon

ourselves the burden of pain that daily ascends to Heaven because of the corruption of our race.

Those who find themselves laughing a little too much, and ignoring the sadness of the human condition, need to take note here.

12:16

“Be of the same mind toward one another.”

This admonition will be repeated by the apostle in 15:5. And is spelled out by James in his second chapter. It is about impartiality. It has been a thorn in our side for a long time. Treating everyone the same. No favorites.

Paul has already told us in 2:11 that there is no partiality with God. Peter echoes this in Acts when he appears at Cornelius’ house and sees the Holy Spirit is falling. God is partial only to His own choices. Not to nationality, race, intelligence level, income, personality, willingness, niceness, outward conformity to the rules. God can save anyone.

But we must never assume He will save everyone. There is still an election. Every broad statement of Scripture needs to be trimmed by qualifying statements elsewhere, until we have the whole truth.

Nevertheless, we are not the great Elector. Our impartiality must be total. Anyone we meet is a potential candidate for the eternal Kingdom of God. We are not to allow any self-satisfaction to cloud our vision when we see a sinner that we think God could never save. He saved you. Do you realize just how awful your sins were and are in His sight? Yet you are in.

“The same thing toward one another minding” is the word order here. Some modern translations have taken this thought to be, “Live in harmony with one another.” But in the flow of the text, I believe the idea of impartiality fits better:

When people are happy, be happy with them. Sad, sad. Be impartial in your thinking to everyone. Don't be high-minded, hang out with lowly people. And so on.

Let's move on to that next thought, which is our 18th!

"Do not set your mind on high things but associate with the humble."

This could be considered two ideas. We'll try to see it as one, as the text seems to demand. Notice the seeming unbalanced grammar here. High things vs (as in KJV) "men" of low estate. Things vs men.

He's talking to Christians who are bound by their "stuff." Their need for better and better "things." Their desire to be in high places socially. Their search for "acceptable" friends. People in their income bracket. Powerful positions. The most expensive restaurants. The latest fashions, so as to be acceptable.

High things come in many shapes and sizes but they all amount to the exclusion of low people, and that seems to be the goal. No more, Paul says. Get down here where you belong, in the highways and byways, associating with people who know their need of God and will easily repudiate the world if you will just ask them.

"Do not be wise in your own opinion."

KJV has it "conceits." Here it is "opinion". What saith the Greek? Nothing. Simply, do not be wise in yourselves. "In your own estimation" is in other translations, and probably does justice to what Paul is saying. But assuming only "yourselves" to be what Paul said, you can think this way:

People know you. God knows you. To some people you are wise. Perhaps even God, since He has placed wisdom inside of you through the Spirit, sees wisdom there. In *them* you may be wise. But not in yourselves. Let

not a thought of pride rise up from within that carnal nature of yours and say to you, You are wise! People should listen to you!

Rather, with Paul, claim Christ as your wisdom, should anyone care to ask where it all comes from. People who live like this never argue. They present their case as well as they can, listen carefully to another side if need be, then let it drop. They do not have to be right, for they realize they are fallible. If they are presenting a Biblical truth from the Bible, even then they allow that they may not have full understanding of that verse. They allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in the other life.

Oh that all those who thought themselves wise, knew the truth.

12:17

“Repay no one evil for evil.”

Suddenly we are back in verse 14. In fact, the rest of this chapter could be said to expand the theme of our relationship to enemies. We assume these enemies are outside the church, but no statement to that effect is made. There have been instances where animosity has flared up between brothers in Christ. Paul gives the solution for their reconciliation here, in addition to the admonition in 14 not to curse. He says, Let it stop right from the beginning. This is worded a bit awkwardly at the end of verse 17, but echoed with an easier understanding in 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

“Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”

Here the Greek favors the KJV, which says, “Providing things honest...” The Greek says “providing right” with “things” understood by the ending of the adjective “right.” So, don’t try to get even, do the right thing.

More clear in Thessalonians: “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone [nearly word for word the same] but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

Paul assumes in both passages that seeking vengeance is wrong. Don't do that. Instead, come up with a way to turn that evil that has come against you into something right and good and profitable for the people concerned and for anyone who may have witnessed it.

Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta may be instructive. The people in charge on board refused to listen to Paul. What did he know about wind and weather? When their guidance failed, Paul could have started blaming everyone and gone off in a huff to lick his wounds. Instead we see him starting a fire, healing the sick, lifting up the Lord, blessing the islanders.

Old Testament Joseph is the classic example of providing something good in the face of evil. What vengeance he could have wreaked on his evil brothers! Test them he did, but no attempt at getting even is in the text. In fact, the removal of the young nation called Israel to a place of safety during a famine is how the story blossoms into "providing right" in the sight of all men.

This discussion is not over. The chapter will spend its four final verses expanding things even further.

12:18

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

Still talking about evil that comes into your life, for which you are tempted to get even. Paul places two qualifiers on his general command of "no vengeance."

Sometimes it is not possible to be at peace with all those who are hurting you. If an entire group of people, as a village of savages in the wilds of the jungle, do not like your missionary efforts, Paul would not advise you just to sit and wait to be killed. You cannot live peaceably with men who are

bound for war. The Psalmist laments, "My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace, But when I speak, they are for war." There are times, when peace with your surroundings, your neighbors, is not possible. Time to move on. Understood.

There are other times when your peace must be limited. You are in a family situation where one part of the family has taken one side and the other is on the opposing side. The situation might be politics, or a church dogma, or an issue with the local school. Here, only Divine wisdom can help. If it were up to you, there would be a clear choice, and war. Same on the other side. Wisdom comes down and creates a position that is not compromising to either side, and brings peace to all sides. It depended on you to pray and bring forth that answer.

There are things that are impossible and things that depend on you to navigate, but generally speaking, peace with all those in your vicinity is the order of the day. Peace without compromise. Lot had peace with his neighbors who were evil, and you see where that got him. No peace with the Devil or the lies of the Devil. No peace with the world system. But a measure of peace whenever possible with those whom you must meet every day, so as to be able at the right time to share God's peace with those people.

Above all, the peace of God must rule your heart, to accomplish such a task. When that happens within, you will perhaps be amazed at how few times you will feel called to go to war. There are things that matter. And a lot more that don't. Wisdom knows the difference.

12:19

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;"

12:14, bless and do not curse. 12:17, Repay no one evil for evil. And now, Do not avenge yourself. Was something going on in the Roman church already? Meaning, the church of Rome would one day indeed become the

source of anti-Jewish vengeance. Rome would try to get even with its persecutor, and do it in the name of the Jesus whom they persecuted.

Jesus' own response to such persecution is recorded in Acts 8. The foul fiend of a persecuting Jew, name of Saul, is confronted by Jesus Himself. He is forgiven all His sin, and put into a ministry that continues for 2,000 years, to be a source of grace and salvation to millions.

Not Rome. Rome becomes the new persecutor in centuries to come. The Roman church will begin to look at itself as the head of all the churches. Then the head of all human governments. The righteous self-appointed distributor of God's justice to the world. Her coming fall is justified. Rome will not rule in the New Jerusalem.

Did it begin in the first century? All these warnings about blessing vs cursing, no vengeance...

No, in God's sight, prominence is given to those who are obedient, not to those who live in a geographical position. The church of Washington D.C. is not the leader somehow of the church of America. The church is defined by Heaven's standards, not men's. Rome had no right to rule, only an opportunity to seem that it did.

"Give place to wrath" in the KJV and older translations has given way to "leave room for God's wrath." Don't fill up the space that was intended to be occupied by God, with yourself. Give place. Leave room. Step aside. This is not your business, church. What God says to the church of Rome must be spoken to all the church today.

Politics is not our calling. The church is to preach the Gospel. God takes care of the affairs of the world. If the world despises you, puts you on a cross, remember what it did to our Founder. So be it. Sit down. Let God handle it.

This is not a new idea, church. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35.

“ ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ ” says the Lord.

That passage’s context is judgment on Israel. Moses is singing a song of judgment on his own people. He outlines all the good things God did for them, then traces their history of apostasy. And since they will not repent, God intervenes and tells them He will avenge His own people.

What is Paul suggesting by using such a verse? That even when God’s people are evil and coming against the few righteous that are left, those righteous are to keep still and let God do His work. We assume, of course, that the normal practices of warning, even excommunicating, have taken place, and yet the people of God will not listen.

Gradually the Roman church through the centuries realized that the Biblical methods were not working to bring repentance. So they turned to the sword, as their governmental counterparts in the city of Rome. They began to rule by force. They ceased being the church that God could bless with His Spirit.

Unfortunately, Protestants who saw “Mother church” acting this way, began to do the same. The Reformers were guilty of bloodshed also. I will not compare. The numbers are disputed, of course. But shedding blood in the name of Jesus is forbidden. The church is not advanced by our power plays.

Preach truth. Admonish sinners. Put them out if you must. But let God take it from there. Hands off. It’s not your concern. Now Paul brings in another passage to bolster his point: Proverbs 25:21, 22a.

12:20

“Therefore, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink;”

Solomon and his father knew much about enemies. How unusual to find the son of the famous warrior who slaughtered the enemies of Israel with God's blessing, calling out in this softer tone. Yet both sentiments can exist, and always will in fact.

Jesus Christ will return one day to do what David did. His enemies will be defeated in a firestorm of judgment that will be as bloody as it is conclusive. At that same time period, that same Heavenly Person, that same Judge of all the earth, will lift into the Kingdom reign a people who were once His enemies but are now the people of God.

Jesus demonstrated Solomon's words when he was here. "Father, forgive them..." He will demonstrate David's word one day also.

We are to live, says Paul, in the "Solomon" era. Horrifically, the so-called church of the Middle Ages began to think in Davidic terms, and declared physical war on its enemies. This was never to be the place of Kingdom people now. We are people of peace who preach a Gospel of grace to God's enemies. If they accept, they will be loved and received. If they wish to remain our enemies after our kindnesses to them, they are in God's hands, not ours.

That is what the last part of Paul's Solomon quote is about:

"For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Kindness shown to an enemy produces one of two results: a repentant heart, or a hardened heart. The hardened heart will manifest itself in continued defiance against God. It will become obvious who they are when they continue to hate you in spite of what you have offered. They are then targets of God's judgments when they could have been objects of His love and care.

MacArthur shares that the idea of burning coals on someone's head, and I quote him now in his commentary on page 203, "referred to an ancient

Egyptian custom. When a person wanted to demonstrate public contrition, he would carry on his head a pan of burning coals to represent the burning pain of his shame and guilt.”

We do not show kindness that someone will be humiliated or judged. We do it because God wants it done. It may be against our nature, but it is not against His. Love your enemies. Do not judge them. And, as Paul concludes,

12:21

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

A fitting summary of the discussion. Evil people do evil things to us. We are not to allow that evil to swallow up our joy and walk with Christ. The enemy’s design is to destroy us, sometimes, by those very close to us in the workplace, even in the church or home.

We are not to curse in return, verse 14. We are not to repay evil for evil, verse 17. We are not to avenge ourselves, verse 19. Any of that activity would show we have been overcome by their evil and the evil still resident within us. The flesh would be in control.

Instead we are to behave as Jesus outlined for us. The oft-maligned but still very true adage about turning the other cheek applies. Giving more than you are sued for is still there. An eye for an eye is the old way, Jesus says. The new way is not only forgiveness, but giving good in place of the evil you have just forgiven. That makes you the conqueror, the winner in every situation.

Carnal power is not the promise to believers. But victory by the Spirit’s work in us, the new man in Christ. We don’t do what we are expected to do. We are a constant surprise of refreshment to a watching world.

Think of the evil that someone is working on you at this very hour. Now think how you can love that person, and overcome that evil with a good deed in return.

Chapter 13 now continues with more surprising news for those who walk in the flesh but believe they are somehow following Jesus.

13:1

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

“Higher powers” is the KJV rendering. The Greek supports both: “authorities above.” Though one might look only at this line and conclude Paul is talking about angelic realms, the context quickly dissolves that line of thought. This is a serious discussion of the Christian’s responsibility to his civil government.

It is always wise to remember not only the textual context but the historical context, when reading the Bible. This passage from the Holy Spirit inspired apostle was written in the days of the Roman Emperors, quite possibly Nero, the worst of the worst when it came to his hatred for the church.

Further, it is common in this passage to talk of all the exceptions to the rule. Those exceptions are made clear elsewhere, and so we will not discuss them here. Paul mentions no exceptions in Romans 13, and neither will we. Let us seriously listen to Paul’s every word, and do as he says.

Every soul submitted to the government! One of many teachings of Paul that has lost its power through the centuries, in the light of so many bad forms of government, not to mention compromising Christians. But the word of God does not change, whether the culture changes or not. God’s people are good citizens, obedient.

“for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

The passage gets more difficult to deal with as we progress through it. Every authority that exists is given its right to be by permission of God Himself. The principle has been laid down. It is not to be discussed, it is to be obeyed without question, in the light of Nero’s first century government.

Except for his preaching of the Gospel of King Jesus in the very backyard of “King” Nero, Paul was obedient to the government of his day. God expects his people today to be likewise obedient. God truly is in control, as we love to say without thinking what that might mean to our daily lives. If He is the controller, I must be the controlled.

There is no contradiction here between the concept of Satan as the Prince of this world, and “no authority except from God.” Obviously if Satan and his angels have control of the world system at present, no one is saying that God approves of the way things are being run. One day the kingdoms of this world will be Jesus’, and forever. At present, God has appointed, permitted, Satan’s rule. For His own purposes.

Abortion clinics are of Satanic origin but they are allowed to exist now. Then, no. Bars and liquor stores are evil dens of iniquity that flourish under Satan’s rule but will be abolished when King Jesus reigns personally.

Just as Job was able to wrangle permission from God to reign over Job for a time by putting death and disease in his way, so his chaotic methodology has been given a green light for the planet, bringing the untold suffering we see.

Who was responsible, you say, when the disaster came to your family? Satan was. But God could have stopped it. But He didn’t. He controls ultimately every detail, and allows only up to point A. Point B could have

been reached, but only in theory. God has placed boundaries on Satan's rule as surely as He has put limits on the oceans.

Why the free flow of evil, then? We go deep into the mind of God for this, and we stumble around a bit as we try, but some thoughts that come immediately:

Evil abounds so that God's judgment of it will be seen universally to be just. Evil abounds to test the love of God's people, and make them strong. In many cases evil is stopped by a clear word from God and that temporary setback is a warning to Satan and his world as to the power of God and His eventual victory. God's true children come to see Satan for who he is and love their Master all the more.

There are more, I am sure, many more reasons. Suffice it here to say that the answer to "Why is there evil in the world?" is Satan. As to why God allows it/him, the above serves as a beginning to an answer that we will not fully comprehend until we are with Him.

Knowing that God has ordained that evil governments be allowed to prosper gives us a different mindset, a different worldview. All too many Christians see themselves as politicians who must change their nation for good so God will be pleased with what he sees. But we must ask, is God pleased with His North Korean people? Oh I think so! Their government is awful, and I often pray for its overthrow by the people of this world. But look at the holy people it is producing.

America is free, for the time being. And look what freedom has done to so many of God's people. We are lukewarm to cold. We have in many cases lost the mission part of the great commission. We are willing to give money to reach the heathen of other lands, while the heathen of America are ignored. And heathen practices are allowed to invade the church.

Women's liberation, abortion, and homosexuality come to mind right away. All of this, under a government that is kind to us and that we would die to defend.

Suppose you lived under a Communist government, and that government was right here in America. This is a theory that is easy to visualize now. What would you do? Before you answer, Mr. right-wing militia-lover, read verse 2. I have been literal so far in my look at Paul's letter, and I won't stop that practice now. Read it very carefully with me:

13:2

"Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God..."

Whoever resists Adolf Hitler, resists God. Yes? Did Corrie ten Boom and the countless others who housed Jews during the Holocaust, resist God? I think not. They obeyed God who tells His people to care for others. But they did not attack Hitler, stage protests, or like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, conspire with others to kill the Fuhrer.

It is possible to obey God and man at times. When there is a choice, we must obey God, of course, but all too many in my nation think there is constantly a choice to be made. Over-taxation is not a reason to be disobedient to the government. God supplies tax money to the over-taxed.

Corrupt leadership is not a reason for disobedience. Vengeance and correction belong to the Lord, not His people.

Paul is clear here,

"and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

It starts with traffic laws. Then cheating on income taxes. "Robbing a thief cannot be bad", we say, to our shame. But theft is theft and is punishable.

It goes up from there, until anarchy and assassination seem justifiable. But they are not. Resist government and receive judgment. Not just good governments, but bad ones too. Obey as long as God's Word allows such obedience.

13:3

"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil."

Are you the kind who gets nervous when he sees a police car in his rear view mirror? When a letter with IRS on the return address section of the envelope lands in your mailbox? Could it be that you have been a law-breaker, and you believe justice is about to be meted out to you?

No need for this. Paul says,

"Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."

Obey the laws of the land. There is absolutely no excuse for a Christian to be a law-breaker unless the law is asking you to break a law of God. And that doesn't happen, very often, in our country.

As to "praise" from the police or the IRS, it's hard to imagine authorities sending you a thank-you for obeying the law, but the absence of any tickets or fines is certainly an indication that you are in favor with the law. God Himself will second that favor with rewards of His own.

Biblically, we think of examples such as Daniel, who was willing to pay the price for disobedience at one time, but who for the most part was totally in line with the rules of the Empire. Paul tried his best to be a good Jew, but when he had to, along with Peter, he broke Jewish and Roman laws to preach Christ.

Jesus Himself kept the laws of Rome, even using a miracle to pay taxes. But He came against the laws of the Jews of his day, as Godly truth was in opposition to them. We too may have to suspend some of the Pharisaism of church governments of our own time to obey God. And we will be soundly rejected and hated for it.

Don't *dare* come against KJV only-ism, for example. You will be called a demon and sent out of the "temple". Don't stand up in a charismatic meeting and say, "This meeting is out of order! Listen to the apostle Paul." It will be "off with his head" immediately.

And above all, do not dare oppose a woman who is in the pulpit. You will be carried out of the meeting, perhaps on a stretcher!

There are traditions that have risen among us that have become laws. But since they come against God's originals, they have to be broken.

Generally speaking, keep the peace, said Paul in the last chapter, as much as is possible and as much as lies in you. You see how these two discussions blend together. And the summary in 12:21 still applies here: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Back to the main trail of human governments, and their representatives.

13:4

"For he is God's minister to you for good."

You will get strange looks if, when asked who is your minister, you give the name of your governor or the President, in addition to the servant leading your church. We must not despise a man who is called God's minister. Yes, Satan is the prince of the power of the air. Yes, Satan has been given temporary authority over much of the cosmos, the ungodly weaving together of human systems to form eventually one system under Lucifer.

But he will only go so far. One day he himself will acknowledge that every step of the way he had to gain permission from the true Ruler of all things, who allowed evil to prosper under Satan for God's own purposes. He will confess that he, Satan, was used of God, that even though he rebelled against the reign of God in heaven, he was instrumental in bringing about the perfect will of God on earth.

Perfect, in the sense that God used every bit of it for His own glory somehow. Not perfect in the sense of moral or righteous or good or happy. God weeps every day over the calamities He has had to allow. One day the weeping will be over, holy perfection will come to earth in the person of the Man He has chosen, the Man Christ Jesus, who also happens to be God in the flesh.

Meanwhile, these evil men around us are God's ministers. We obey them for our own good. We do not have to love their laws, but we have to obey them until they cross over that other line we mentioned. And Paul adds, in case you don't get it yet,

"but if you do evil, be afraid."

How often in the Bible are God's people told to be afraid? We are to fear the Lord. But Paul says we are to fear this minister who doesn't look much like the minister behind our pulpit. His morals may be from the Pit. His habits may shock us. His political corruption may be a thing of note in the world. But he is the minister of God, and will remain in place until God says move on.

Sure you can vote. That may be the means of change. Sure, in this country, peaceful protest is allowed. But disrespect of the government is not. This is the minister of God. Even your church minister needs to allow the word of correction now and then. But once you disrespect him, you have crossed the line. You have gone too far.

Be afraid. And if you are not motivated simply by a word from an apostle, listen to the reasoning of the apostle:

“for he does not bear the sword in vain.”

Plain enough? Got it? You break the law, you pay for it. And how great a testimony is it for the people of the world to see you in jail, or with a brightly-colored ticket on your car, or you pulled over to the side of the road while a police car rotates its lights behind you? The minister of God has the means to humiliate and even cause pain. Fear him.

“for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

For the hard-headed among us, Paul has to repeat himself. It is a servant of God who issues that ticket. A servant of God that arrests you, takes you to jail or to court. You can cry if you want, but it may be that you will find that in the church which Satan oversees, mercy is not as readily available. And God may be using this incident to teach you something very important, thus answering a prayer you already prayed for holiness or more self-control.

We must admit that this passage seems to be talking to the world as much as the church. It is a general statement. Most of God’s people do not have to deal with breaking the laws of men. But just in case, the record is here. And Paul goes on to say, this is not just about shielding one’s self from punishment, this is about something else:

13:5

“Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake.”

There's always room for growth in our walk. For many, obeying the law just because not obeying the law will have a price tag, is a step up. Paul says that is not enough.

Does not conscience tell you to obey the law because God's minister wants you to obey the law? Because you love God and want to obey Him? Because you know instinctively that law-breaking is not a Christian thing? Because you know that it is a bad testimony to the world to be a disrespecter of authority? Because your children are watching you?

MacArthur poses a serious challenge to this way of thinking. He totally defends Paul's words here, but has to admit, and I believe rightly, that the United States was born out of a violation of Scripture. Christians took arms against a legitimate, though oppressive, government.

For many who fought the revolution, their consciences had been formed by seemingly logical reasons to go to war. There always seems to be a logical reason. Paul contends that to oppose the government is to oppose God's ministers. He tells us that our conscience must be formed by the teachings of Jesus, not the logic of men.

Something to think and pray about. The dark days in which we live may call people to take up arms again. The nation is seriously divided. Will it come to armed conflict? What will you do, in the light of Romans 13 and other such passages? Peter joins Paul (1 Peter 2:13-15) in calling Christians to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

But what if the ignorant foolish men are in charge of the government? We trust God and submit, Paul seems to say. To avoid the penalty, and to keep a clean conscience before God. Paul next gives an example, a very difficult one in every age:

13:6

“For because of this you also pay taxes...”

MacArthur states that tens of billions of dollars are withheld by cheating citizens of this country every year. I hope you are not one of them. Sure there are tax breaks we should seek. But stealing from the Federal government is not only a crime, it is a sin. There simply is no way to justify it, Christian.

I can imagine there are Christians who cheat Uncle Sam so as to be able to give a larger sum to the church. But God does not need your money. He needs your obedience. How much money did it take for the Holy Spirit to fall on the first disciples? God’s blessings on the church have been freely given. You will not advance righteousness by unrighteous behavior.

Others of course just want to get by financially, and can’t imagine how they will do it by being honest. Nevertheless, God’s Word here is clear. Pay what you owe. Render to Caesar what (he thinks) is his. God will provide a way for you to keep afloat.

“for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.”

As is often the case with Paul, he repeats himself here. Those IRS folks are not just pests and unwanted visitors. They are God’s ministers. By viewing them in this heavenly way, though they may be corrupt and greedy, the Christian learns submission and trust in God. They cheated you? You took every legal recourse to correct the matter? Then God is going to provide that lost income some other way. Let God serve you as you obey Him.

13:7

“Render therefore to all their due.”

Even now he does not surrender this teaching to some vague generalization. Whatever they want of you, within of course the realm of obedience first to God, give to them. Not because they deserve it, but because you need the humility it takes to do it, and so that the government can run smoothly and you can live in peace, as well as they. Many things function well as a result of this teaching, which goes back again to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-42, among His hardest sayings.

There in Matthew Jesus commands us to turn the other cheek, not to be content with a slap on only one. To give more than you are sued for. To run twice as much as one demands that you run, to give and lend upon request.

Our carnality hates all of this. Numerous are the arguments and explanations and excuses raised when these words are read. But none of this is needed. If Jesus and Paul both agree it is a good thing to love our enemies and obey unrighteous governments, then it must be.

Remember that neither Jesus or Paul went afoul of the government of their days. Neither led a protest. Neither was involved in a plot to kill Caesar. Both gave their very lives away to seal their testimony and teaching. To use a Pauline question, Are we better than they?

No,

“Taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs.”

These are both financial obligations. Matthew and Zacchaeus had been at the receiving end of this business when they met Jesus. Their corrupt practices were not condoned, yet none of Jesus’ followers were admonished to stop giving money to this sort of man.

I imagine that most who read or hear this teaching are already compliant. But what about the next couple of admonitions?

“Fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

I am sure that, the way these words come across to a casual reader, many think they mean that a person can just give respect to those who they think are worthy. The context would point a different direction. In these days, it would be heard to find a politician, a governing authority, that walks according to God’s precepts continually. There was corruption in Paul’s day too.

No, the passage , I believe is about enemies. It is men of this world, who have been given their authority by God but who serve in an immediate sense, the prince of the power of the air. These men are to be feared and honored because of their office.

Jesus commanded the disciples to honor the words of the Pharisees that helped put Him to death. Never walk in their ways, He told them, but when they are over you in your society, you obey them as much as lies in you. After all they sit in the seat of Moses. In many cases they are giving you the very word of God. Do what you are told, even if it’s a hypocrite telling you.

In verse 8, Paul kicks it up a notch by talking about love. It doesn’t get any easier as the letter moves on. Only a Spirit-filled man can obey a Spirit-filled apostle.

13:8

“Owe no man anything.”

The Greek allows for a second-person translation as in John 5:39, “You search the Scriptures.” Here it would be, “You owe no man anything except to love one another. Makes good sense grammatically, at least in English. Nevertheless, the translators are fairly consistent in making this a command of Paul, “Owe no man anything.”

A literalist like myself is left with a desire to obey, but a series of Scriptures that seem to point elsewhere. Moses certainly allowed God's people to borrow, at least from one another. But the accompanying demand was, No interest. (Exodus 22:25 et al.) When this principle was broken, men of God rebuked the offenders, as in the Nehemiah story of the early-returning Jews after the Babylonian captivity.

But borrowing and lending were acceptable to Jewish people. How did Jesus look at it? "Give to him that asks of you." The giving is commanded. The asking is expected. Things happen. People need help.

If Moses and Jesus approve of borrowing at times, what does Paul mean here? Could it refer to the idea of "coming behind" in a debt? Renters and mortgage-owners alike have a debt to pay the first of every month. That is not frowned upon. A commitment has been made. Paul says, perhaps, Keep that commitment. Don't be late. Don't have people or businesses saying of you that you owe them something. Of course, you owe them the original debt. But creditors do not think of you as an offender until you have broken your commitment.

I do not like to explain away texts. Perhaps I, as a Western thinker, assume that everyone must be in debt, because "that is the way we live here." But there are many exceptions. Paying cash is always desirable. Being out of any debt is the best way to go. But if circumstances seem to point to a long-term commitment, be sure to honor that pledge. Your testimony will be affected otherwise.

And of course there is that other exception that is the reason for this verse to begin with:

"except to love one another."

Here the passage transcends things financial altogether. The context has been obedience to the laws of men, the requirements that men place on us. They want us to pay taxes, they want us to honor their ordinances,

they want us to respect them. Don't "owe" them anything, that is, Don't come behind in any of these expectations, but do remember there is one debt you can never fully pay: love.

God so loved the world. The unredeemed, sinful world. The unworthy world. We are to love like this when it comes to the governing authorities, for the governing authorities are the subject of this chapter so far. Obey them. Respect them. Give them the requirements they ask. But above all, love them.

This is not about brotherly love, at least exclusively. You will see at the end of verse 10 that we are talking about love to our neighbor. God's love is to be extended past the church walls into the world around us, causing us to do all we do for the right motivation. Not just fear of wrath, not even just conscience, but especially, love,

"for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Higher and higher goes Paul's thinking. He has stopped thinking about the laws of men and has graduated to the law of God. It is God's nature to love at all times. That must be our nature. And here he enters into the thoughts of Jesus Himself who summed up the law in two easy-to-remember commandments, Love God, Love neighbor. Paul's emphasis here is on the latter, and he goes on to quote that part of the ten commandments that illustrates his point:

13:9

"For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet'...

Of course Paul is talking about the law of Moses, the Sinai tablets of stone, as recorded in Exodus 20 and other places. There were ten commandments on those two stones, but Paul mentions only the five that

have to do with human relationships, the topic of his discussion from the last chapter through this one so far. Some would want to include the fifth commandment regarding children and parents. Paul leaves that open by saying,

“and if there is any other commandment”

That is, whatever God has ever said about people getting along with each other, about people caring about other people, meeting the needs of other people, blessing enemies, even obeying the governmental authorities,

“are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

Buried in an otherwise obscure passage of the Levitical law, in Leviticus 19, this gem of wisdom pointed to by Jesus Himself and His great apostle, these words are considered among the most important ever spoken to mankind, and to his people in particular.

Leviticus 19 is about sacrifices, how to reap a harvest, and then it shifts into some of the commandments of the Decalogue. Do not steal. Do not lie. No swearing. No cheating. Care for the deaf and blind. No impartiality to the poor. No gossip. No hating. No vengeance. And then there it is, instead of vengeance and grudge, as it appears now in our text,

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Lord puts His own signature on this command in the Mosaic text: “I am the Lord.”

The context of Leviticus, and Romans also, is “the children of your people.” We should love the world as God loves the world, for sure. But the commands about loving the neighbor are given in the heart of passages about the people of God.

The Pharisees wanted to know who their neighbor is. That is the question that motivated the classic tale of the Good Samaritan.

If we still keep the word in the Christian context, a neighbor, which only means one who is nearby, can mean that social class in the church that we ignore. The Jews and Gentiles in the church of Rome needed to hear this. They were to love each other, along with any Samaritans that showed up, too. That is, people who called on the name of the Lord in a way that looked different than the way they called on Him.

One third of the world's population wears the name "Christian" in one way or another. We who are evangelicals [as I classify myself at present] tend to look askance at those who do not worship as we do. The same party spirit is among us as was there in the city of Rome. Paul would have those barriers broken down when it comes to our love.

What that could mean in terms of the multitude of denominations among us, I won't try to guess. But the words of the apostle are clear. We are in debt to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to love them. Whoever they are. Whatever their status. Wherever they are found. And however they may disagree with us on this or that point of doctrine. The early church had its disagreements too. But love is to be the standard in every generation.

13:10

"Love does no harm to a neighbor;"

Sounds obvious enough. Of course not. But Paul is dealing with Christians in the church of Rome who are indeed harming one another. Jews and Gentiles were having a tough time reconciling to each other. There was hypocrisy, prejudice, selfishness, vengeance, pride, disobedience to authorities. All harmful qualities that Paul had to address. It is the sinfulness of man, man's bad habits, that are the very reason for the epistles of our New Testament. One should not feel singled out when he

reads the writings of Paul and Peter. All of us are included. Church members, the truly born again, are being corrected and are growing thereby. That's why we must all stay in the Word regularly.

Love is the goal. And Paul has pointed out carefully and mercilessly, that the Christians in the church of Rome did not love. That they were harming their neighbors and their testimony in the world.

“therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

As he just said in verse 9 and Jesus said before him. All the commands about human relationships can be boiled down to this one: love your neighbor. God's ways are not hard to understand, but incredibly difficult to do. Jesus said, without Me, you can't do anything.

13:11

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.”

“And this, knowing the time, that hour we already out of sleep should be aroused” is the Greek order. Though the English and the Greek seem a little awkward here, the meaning could not be clearer. Wake up, slumbering Christian. The days are evil. They were evil then, they are evil now. The managing ruler of this world for now is Satan and he has things in a royal mess. Whether you believe Jesus is coming today or hundreds of years from today, this verse rings true.

Wake up. Your own time may be very near. Lukewarmness and a comfortable sleep has settled on much of the church in our day, and in Paul's and in John's when he gave us the Revelation and the seven churches of Asia. There is always a danger of falling asleep at the switch. Always the possibility that we drop our guard and forget we are in a deadly battle. Things go well with us for periods of time and we lose sight of the war clouds that are always on the horizon.

Wake up. Watch. Pray. As Charlotte Elliott wrote for us over two hundred years ago

1
Christian, seek not yet repose,
Hear thy gracious Savior say;
Thou art in the midst of foes:
 Watch and pray.

2
Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours:
 Watch and pray.

3
Gird thy heavenly armor on,
Wear it ever night and day;
Ambushed lies the evil one:
 Watch and pray.

4
Hear the victors who o'ercame,
Still they mark each warrior's way;
All with one sweet voice exclaim,
 Watch and pray.

5
Hear, above all, hear thy Lord,
Him thou lovest to obey;
Hide within thy heart His word:
 Watch and pray.

6
Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day;
Pray, that help may be sent down:
 Watch and pray.

“for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”

Again, words that can be spoken truthfully in every generation. We’re a lot closer than Paul was. We’re a lot closer than Augustine. We’re a lot closer than Luther. We’re a lot closer than Spurgeon. We’re a lot closer than was Billy Graham. Closer and closer we come every day.

What about verse 12? Can we truthfully say that?

13:12

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”

Far spent, we get. It has been dark on this planet since the fall of man. Paul could look back through thousands of years and not see much in the way of light since Eve bit the fruit. “Dark, dark has been the midnight,” goes the song. But two thousand years ago, Paul said that the day was at hand.

And Paul is not the only New Testament writer who indicates that the end of all things seems to be right around the corner. How do we deal with their thinking in the light of Biblical inspiration?

1Peter 4:7, “The end of all things is at hand.”

At least four times in the book of Revelation, John tells us in the words of Jesus, that He is coming quickly. Though the word “quickly” could be speaking of method as easily as time, there is an urgency about the New Testament that has kept us on the edge of our seat for centuries. Yet He does not come.

And the world, fulfilling another word of Peter, mocks us and asks us, Where is the promise of His coming? That was a long time ago. They believed it would be soon. You folks are just being deceived.

The promise of a Messiah to begin with took centuries to be fulfilled. Prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord spoke of His coming five to seven centuries before the event. But the event finally happened. This second event will, also.

The day is at hand as we speak. It is approaching (the basic meaning of the Greek verb here). It is nearer and nearer. It is near when compared to the thousands of years that have passed already, and was in Paul's day too. It may be soon even by our standards. It is definitely soon by God's standards, for whom a thousand years are as one day.

His approach is invisible but real. A step closer every day. Paul uses this fact as a motivator to the Roman Christians and us:

"Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness"

Though the world is dark because it continually deals in the works of darkness, that is not to be our agenda. Ephesians 5:11 has Paul telling God's people to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. In fact we are told to expose these works. As we read on in this verse we are led to understand that the method of exposing darkness is shining light.

"And let us put on the armor of light."

Jesus said we should let our light shine before men, that men could see our works, and by that sight, glorify the Father. This verse is not about apologetics. This is not about exposés on other religions. This is not about books or sermons or testimonies. This is simply about dressing ourselves in light.

The Christian life, when lived per the Spirit and the Word, is so clearly different than the life of those who are in darkness. That life itself is considered to be our armor against darkness and our weapon that penetrates darkness.

A man who faithfully raises a family, is true to his wife, stays away from the drinking dens and the gambling dens, is active in his church, is not addicted to sports and food: that man is different. He sends out a message to his neighborhood and whatever sphere of influence that is his, I have something you don't have. That message penetrates hearts, and can change lives.

Yet in the church of Rome of Paul's day and our own, and in your church, there are those still hanging around the darkness, not willing to let that light shine. Hence this epistle. That's how we got a New Testament, from ignorant and/or disobedient Christians.

Paul spells out some of the description of Christian living in the last two verses of the chapter.

13:13

"Let us walk properly, as in the day."

The world is all around us and inviting us to stay a part of its darkness. For the world, it is forever night. But we are to walk as though it were day, because, for us, it is day.

"Properly" in the NKJV has been changed from "honestly" in the KJV. Not sure that either of those words get at the original Greek, which is translated "decently" in other KJV passages. Strong says the meaning of the word is basically "decorously", which has to do with beauty, grace, and good taste.

Walk as is appropriate for a child of the light. The meaning can be extracted then from the context. How should children of light walk? He gives three pairs of examples of the opposite of light-living, showing by these what exactly would be appropriate and proper. First pair,

“not in revelry and drunkenness”

KJV speaks of “rioting.” “Revels” and “drinking” show up in the Greek interlinear. Drinking parties, the object of which is utter drunkenness and foolish behavior. Why in the world would Paul have to mention this to saints? It is altogether possible that the liberty one experiences in Christ Jesus has not informed the habits of the new Christian. The immature ones, having escaped damnation and bondages of all kinds, have not yet learned of the harmful effects of their old lives. Paul educates them here.

We are a happy joyful people. Joy unspeakable is what ought to be among us. But the source of that joy is no longer to be alcoholic in nature. A clean break must be made with our old lives that never produced any lasting good in us or through us.

We must be firm without being judgmental to the new ones in Christ: Partying with the world or even among ourselves in this way is not acceptable. It bears no good fruit.

This taking in of substances to the body would encompass the gluttony that is smiled at among us also. Too many Christians do not have control over their eating habits as well as their drinking habits, and are eating themselves to an early grave and serious illnesses. Destroying the body in any way is not a great testimony to those who are on the outside watching.

The second pair:

“not in lewdness and lust”

“chambering and wantonness” says the KJV and the Greek. But we are left on the outside with words like these. What is “chambering”? Is it the same as the NKJV “lewdness”? The word springs from the word for “couch” or “bed”, which suggests fornication. The act of cohabitation. Yes, that practice needs to be attacked in the church, even today. More so

today, perhaps. People who have had an experience with Christ, falling into sexual sins of all kinds.

“Wantonness” is licentious behavior which has its root in lust in the heart, as Jesus said.

Christians in sexual sin? We agree that some of these people are Christian in name only. But some simply have not yet learned how to curb their passions and turn those longings toward a relationship of intimacy with Christ.

Lest some try to wiggle out of this label, we must add pornography, lewd movies with their bedroom scenes, improper dress, and the ever ogling eyes of men, and yes women, at the beach.

Paul says, cast it all off. These are works of darkness. These are symptoms of the sleeping. Jesus Christ is near. Your very day of meeting Him could be today. Wake up church. Get out of the drinking dens and the porno shops. If you can't handle the internet, pitch that computer. Throw away that phone. Be drastic. Do what you must do to wake up.

If you don't think you have been touched by any of this so far, take a look at the final pair:

“not in strife and envy.”

Darkness. We're talking about darkness as opposed to God's light. Drunken vile parties. Sexual perversion of every sort. Arguing with your wife. What? Yes, the word Paul uses is not about wars between nations. It is about wars between spouses. Wars between brothers at church. Wars of religious wrangling. Political fights. It's not talking about disagreement. As long as we are here on earth, we will disagree with everyone on some things. It's how we handle those disagreements that is now front and center.

How do you handle it when you discover that someone close to you is of a different persuasion? Tension? Rising blood pressure? Shouting? Vindictiveness? Even a hatred? Self-righteousness? Desire to be right no matter what? Animosity? Revenge?

Strife – arguing – is darkness. It is sin. Accept it. Deal with it. Don't change Paul. Change you. Your offense doesn't justify your being offensive. Pray for a heart of love that will show your fellow that you have something better than you had before.

No, no fair using the word "trigger" any more. "He pushed my button" is out. "I'm passionate about this subject." Sorry. Get passionate about the love of Jesus. Your arguing never brought a soul closer to Jesus, and never will. Grow up.

As for envy. The Greek word points two directions. The basic meaning of the word is "heat." It can be good heat, as in "zeal" for the truth. Or bad heat that makes me fervently desire to be someone else or have something that they have. A mis-directed heat. The opposite of ardor for God is ardor for me. It is darkness. It is sin. It has to go.

Jealous people live in a bondage that equals sexual or alcoholic imprisonment. They obviously can never be what they want to be, for what they want to be has already been allotted to someone else to be. A life of frustration and failure. Bitterness and confusion.

If you see a strain of envy or jealousy in you as you look in the mirror of God's Word, turn from it. Thank God for who you are and what you have and develop that giftedness that is uniquely yours. Life will seem a lot brighter. You'll be walking in the light the apostle describes in this passage.

Walk properly. Here's how not to do it: Drink, sex, self. Here's how to do it,

13:14

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,”

In Galatians, the idea of putting on Christ (3:27) is viewed as an accomplished fact. Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, says Paul there.

Here Paul is admonishing the Romans to be sure the work is done. And he says it in contrast to what he has been talking about. In verse 12, he tells them to throw off darkness. Throw off drunkenness. Throw off sexual sin. Throw off arguing and envying. But throwing things off is not the full occupation of the believer, though some would have us think so. We need to replace darkness with light.

In that same verse 12, we are to put on the armor of light. Here we are told just what that armor is: the Lord Jesus Christ. The picture is of a soldier clothing himself with the proper attire for battle. Our weaponry, our suit of armor, is light. Our Lord is the Light of the world. We are to figuratively place Him, His character, His very presence, His Word, His Truth, His Spirit, on ourselves by conscious regular requests for covering.

There is nothing automatic about the way we are dressed every morning. We choose deliberately how we will appear before our fellow men. So it is in Christ. Though His grace is behind it all, He asks us to be deliberate in allowing ourselves every day to be clothed with Christ. This is another way of describing our walk in the Spirit, the opposite of which is detailed in the final portion of this verse:

“and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

We are told elsewhere that if we walk in the Spirit we cannot fulfill the desires of the flesh. It is impossible. It is possible not to walk fully in the Spirit, but it is not possible to be carnal and spiritual at the same time.

That's why the push is to be in the Spirit, not to fight on our own against our sinful nature.

The flesh, the old carnal man that Paul has already dealt with in his epistle, has an agenda. When we start our day without prayer and the Word, we are left with what the flesh wants to do. Paul says that we should not take forethought, per the Greek. "Provision" is the KJV rendering. When we mentally provide an inlet to our soul for the flesh, it will immediately fill that crack and widen it.

Immediately every day we rush to prayer as our first waking thought, and the flesh will not have a chance to do what it wants. That's putting on Christ, putting in Christ, securing our entire person with the light of Heaven.

Not everyone does this, you know. Not everyone is as mature in faith as he ought to be. Chapter 14 and part of 15 deal with this one final issue: the weak brother, and your responsibility toward him.

14:1

"Receive one who is weak in the faith."

The subject is changed, but only slightly. He has been talking about loving, about not avenging ourselves, about obeying the government, in fact, about all those things that involve a relationship with another human being, whether saved or unsaved.

Now he zeroes in on church relationships. There are obviously many levels of faith and obedience in the Christian church. Paul saw it then, and we surely see it now. Unfortunately, today many of our differences have been clouded over by denominational divisions, and we do not always see in our fellowship the various groupings. Some of the "weak" brothers he will describe have formed denominations around their weakness. Still we must strive to apply this teaching, and reach into those other groups as

Paul recommends. For only at church times are we divided thus. Plenty of time during the week to “receive” a weak brother.

Paul admonishes us to receive, or accept, those with whom we disagree on matters that are not necessarily matters of faith and revelation. The Bible is a big book, and there are things that some people find and build on that are not necessarily for us today, who live in an age of grace. Nevertheless, if someone is hanging on to a teaching, believing God is speaking to him, we must not avoid such a brother, or reject him from our midst.

“But,” warns Paul, when you finally decide that he is your brother and you take him in,

“not to disputes over doubtful things.”

It’s possible that the Scripture is clear to him and you. He is for and you are against. Or it is possible that the Scripture is not clear. There are such cases. And you two have taken sides. When the brother is among you, that is not your time to tear into his theology. How many times do “weak” brothers get attacked by a group of believers who all feel they have the Aquila-Priscilla anointing on them, that is, they are going to teach the word of God more fully to this dear brother.

One on one, if the brother requests it, of course. But group attacks, wrangling over secondary issues before the assembled church, a preacher even targeting the subject in a one-sided manner while the brother is present... all *verboden!*

Paul gives an example over the next few verses, the teachings regarding eating in the Bible.

14:2

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.”

Right away Paul weighs in on the side of liberty, a theme he will develop as the chapter continues. He defines weakness here as limiting certain foods, rather than the opposite. The implication is that one brother has misinterpreted Scripture and the ways of God, while the other is in full harmony with God. But the weak one is not to be treated poorly because of his faulty understanding.

There are times, of course, when “only vegetables” is the way to go. Daniel the prophet would certainly not be considered a weak brother. He is among the strongest spiritual examples in all the Bible. He limited himself, without being judgmental to others, to foods that he knew could not have been offered to idols. He was willing to curb his taste buds to do the right thing at that time. But he would have been the first to tell you, if you had asked, that eating meat is not a sinful thing, that you are free to eat whatever you like.

When Jews entered the assembly at Rome, they came in with a lot of Mosaic baggage. They could not eat this or that and the other, and had to eat this or that and the other. Gentiles had never heard of such rules and were in one sense closer to God’s ideal by their freedom to enjoy whatever God had created. Paul had to settle the score between these two groups. Peace! He says. If a man wants to eat only Mosaic foods, let him. If you are not so bound, not a problem!

14:3

“Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats.”

The context here is not eating in general, I’m sure you understand, but eating foods that some believe to be illegal for the Christian. Foods that

contradict the dietary laws of Moses. Foods that may have been offered to idols in the pagan marketplaces.

There are liberated believers who just know that food is food. Whatever God created, must be good. Gentiles know nothing of Moses' restrictions. They are free. And as they view their conscience-stricken brothers, they tend at times to look down their noses at them. Liberty does that, you know. Have you not at times despised people who seemed bound by what you called "religion", but what they called "conviction"?

These others truly have a conscience that is so convicted about these things that it is like a word from God to them personally. Definite no-no's. Can't eat that, can't drink that. And when they see others who profess to know Christ indulging in the eating of those forbidden foods, they can't believe it. After the initial shock has set in, there comes a growing feeling of suspicion and doubt about the brother's faith. A despising, looking down on, their brother, comes next. And this is where Paul steps in and says, Stop that!

No despising allowed on either side! Right or wrong is not the issue, love is the issue, in this case! I'm not taking this as far as some today do. There are things that Spirit-inspired apostles have said are sinful, and have been sinful from the beginning. Love cannot cover these things. They must be confessed, and love kicks in to forgive and reconcile.

But food issues can be very confusing. For one thing, God's laws are good laws. The things He gave to Moses and Israel are safe for consumption. If a person wants to do what Moses said, let him. Trouble comes when he becomes bound, then passes bondage on to you. The Seventh Day Adventists have fallen into this trap.

Look at Paul's reasoning for receiving those who may be a little too scrupulous:

"for God has received him"

The Jews in particular had to hear this. It was the chosen Jewish race upon whom the Spirit fell first. But when that same Spirit began to fall on Gentiles, the Jews had to be convinced that Gentiles truly were being received into the Kingdom. From that day to this, God has to keep reminding His people to receive into the fellowship those He is calling. They come in all shapes and sizes and dress and skin color and language and culture and music and speech patterns. And God says, Receive them. Take them in. Enfold them with arms of love once you have discerned that God is in them as He is in you.

14:4

“Who are you to judge another’s servant?”

Paul does not seem convinced that the Romans are getting it. God has received the one you despise. That person is a servant of God, not your servant. What makes you think you own him and have a right to withhold fellowship from one for whom Christ died? Get out of the way.

“To his own master he stands or falls.”

If a servant, or an employee in our day, messes up, he is in trouble with the boss, not with you as a fellow employee. As politely as we can, we say, This is none of your business! Stay out of it. If a fellow believer has an issue for or against certain foods, that’s between him and his God. Stay out of it. If he asks for counsel, tell him how far you have come in this matter, but give him no sense that you are condemning his position. We grow. Eventually, we all grow.

“Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”

Theoretically the servant could stand or fall. But in this case, it is assumed that the servant of Christ is correct because he is following his conscience and sincerely trying to serve the Lord. Whatever lack there is will be

supplied, not by you, but by the Master. No matter how low you make him feel, God is going to lift him up and make him stand because he wanted to be faithful to God, not to you or someone else's ideas.

We go from food to religious observances on special days. Even a hotter topic, in some minds.

14:5

“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike.”

Huge fights break out over this one, especially if the concept of Sabbath is brought into the mix. The Jewish tradition, of course, involved many special days, and still does. Occasionally we see Gentile Christians in our own day wanting to observe Jewish holidays. No problem. Until, as in the eating issue, it becomes demanded and expected. There are no such requirements of New Covenant people.

But what about that one special day that both Christian and Jew hold to? It is still called the Sabbath by many Gentile believers, though the idea of a sabbath as in the Old Covenant has passed away with the tithe and circumcision.

The law was nailed to Jesus' cross. All of it. God works the Spirit of that law into our new hearts. Christians do not kill or commit adultery because the Spirit in them will not allow it. So with all the commandments, even the fourth.

There is a rest, says the Word, to the people of God. Jesus gives rest to His people. The Millennial Kingdom is a type of rest that is coming to the planet. So the law is fulfilled whether we keep a particular day or not.

Which brings us back to the text. Many Christians do not feel an obligation to keep one day holy. Instead, they believe they should be holy

every day, resting in Christ. Nevertheless, there are those who wish to do things according to the pattern, and observe one day above another. Sunday.

But where did that come from? Roman Catholicism steps forward and claims credit, for there is no New Testament apostolic command to keep Sunday holy. The Sabbath is the seventh day, Saturday. The phrase “the Lord’s day” in Revelation cannot be tied to either day, though it is likely that a Jewish apostle – John – was probably referring to day seven, not day one.

We see indications that the Christians were beginning to meet on the first day of the week, but no command is ever made to make that a new day of rest. The question is up in the air... next to God, where it belongs. We can argue and research and hold our ground, but when we do, we must realize that others hold a different ground, and Paul says, simply,

“Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”

And don’t be dismayed if that conviction changes through the years! But whatever, no judging is allowed! After all,

14:6

“He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.”

We’re dealing here with a man’s conscience. True, our conscience must be formed by the Word of God, but not all men have read all there is to read on a particular subject, and his conscience has only been partly corrected on the matter.

A Jewish convert would definitely want to observe that seventh day for the rest of his life. Jewish converts in our own day are the same way and even though they are fully conformed to most other Christian teachings,

they love to meet with fellow “Messianic” Jews on Friday night, when the Sabbath begins, to worship and hear God’s Word.

Can anyone condemn this, in the absence of a clear teaching in Scripture?

A Gentile convert will probably have lived in a culture where Christians meet every Sunday morning and are convinced this is the day of the Lord, though with meager Scriptural backing. That new believer will soon have his conscience formed by experience and the little bit of Scripture that his new people will have to convince him that this is the way.

It is hard to tell, often, who is the weaker brother in situations like these. One sees both sides acting as though they were the stronger. Some of them despise the other, some of them carefully teach the other, but to no avail for the most part.

Occasionally one’s eyes are opened as wide as Paul’s and they begin to see every day as holy to the Lord, and that the fight is not worth it. Love and liberty have won out. Until they do, we are to have patience with those who are simply trying to please God the best way they know how.

The same principle then is applied to the eaters he has already addressed in verses 2-3:

“He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.”

No need to repeat the principle here. When that believer bows his head to give thanks for the food in front of him, or for the grace to abstain from the food in front of him, he is not praying to you. He is talking to God. Leave him alone. Whatever God wants to teach him in the future, he will teach him. Meanwhile the issue is not worth the strife Paul has already condemned above in 13:13.

Now a broader principle:

14:7

“For none of us lives to himself and no one dies to himself.”

“Us” is key here. People of this world do indeed live and die to themselves. But we are different. What we do, we do to Christ. Paul wants his people to stop judging other Christians, knowing that other Christians are striving to live for God just as we are. They are not just out there for themselves.

Paul even introduces the topic of death here. By doing this he shows the utter seriousness of his message. When we come to Christ, we are not only willing to live out the ways of Jesus as Light on the earth. We are willing to die for the faith of Jesus. That person you are criticizing has taken upon himself the cross, carrying it to the place of execution, as did his Master. Do you take lightly your criticism of his opinions on such a matter as this? He is your companion in suffering and dying for Jesus.

The next few verses will only expand this idea. Note the passion in Paul’s written voice.

14:8

“For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.”

Paul has gone now well beyond the small issues that started this discussion, namely, “What foods am I allowed and not allowed to eat? What day is holy to God, if any?”

This is even beyond the point of verse 4, This is none of your business, your brother is the Lord’s servant. And in verse 6, Your brother is giving thanks to God for what he does. And God is accepting his thanks and his life.

Now he is talking life and death. This brother whom you might be despising has incorporated his way of eating and worshiping as part of his sacrificial gift to God. This is a man like Abel who believes he is giving the best of his flock to the Creator. If he is wrong, God will speak to him about it.

Your brother is a man who is willing even to die for the Lord. He has a strong faith and walk. He is the Lord's, in short.

"Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

If we are the Lord's, both the brother and the judge of the brother, how careful we ought to be. In fact, sir, Jesus died for this brother. If this argument doesn't stop the offensive mouth, what will?

14:9

"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

No, he has not changed the subject. He is still talking about weaker brothers, as we call them still, who don't have perfect agreement with us, and who tempt us to write them off. Stop it, Paul says. Jesus died for them.

A quick note about "and rose". Some of the older texts do not include these two words. They are redundant, but may have been added later by someone trying to help us in our understanding. But no help is needed. Christ died. He lived again. That can only mean that He rose.

So Jesus died to save us from sin. This we know. Paul shows the expanded idea here. Salvation from sin was not the only thing in view on that awful day, but a Kingdom over which Jesus would be Lord. And while it is true that the living will be caught up to Jesus on that day as well as those in the graves, the reference to living, in context here, seems to be those who are

alive in Christ right now, who have already been raised from their old lives of sin.

So the full argument stands before us. Accept your brother. God accepts him and is working out his salvation with him. More, Jesus died for that brother and wants to be his Lord now and when he dies and goes to be with him.

Paul's words cast a safety net around all those who are oppressed by fellow-Christians because of their different beliefs about these questionable things. Lay off! As he goes on to say,

14:10

“But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother?”

Most would deny it, but we have allowed thoughts of superiority to enter our mind with regards to some of those who hold different opinions. Take the whole KJV-only controversy.

We understand, I hope, that the King James Version of the Bible is a valid and revered translation. Many of my listeners hold to it by choice, and would not read anything else. But others have discovered that some of – though not all of – the corrections made to the KJV by more modern translations are helpful and enlightening. They are not threatened by this at all as they realize there is no inspired English translation, nor has God promised inspiration to any translation from the original Greek and Hebrew.

The teaching is, and this teaching has been handed down through the centuries, that God inspired His men as they wrote their original copies down. Nothing serious has been lost in the translations. The truth is there. Everything you need is there. Salvation and edification are there in every standard translation of the Bible.

There are some among us who cannot handle such a teaching as I have just indicated. To them, that last paragraph is heresy. I would be judged by some of them as a Satanist, a non-Christian bound for hell. Others who are a little more lenient would simply marvel at my ignorance and exclude me from their company whenever possible. Some have stopped reading this transcript already. Without even saying goodbye.

This is the very thing Paul was talking about. And those on the other side are sometimes no better. It is a temptation on the part of the more freed-up people to despise such narrowness of thinking. That's what contempt is. That's what Paul hates.

Paul would say, if he were here today, both sides of this conflict need to look carefully at the other side and realize that people are trying to follow their conscience here. Granted, consciences are fed by words and words sometimes are not well-researched. But let's give each other some breathing room and the benefit of the doubt that we have about their character. Some will draw circles that will exclude you. In the love of Christ we must draw bigger circles that include those drawing the little circles.

Remember that this is not about the essentials of our faith. These are about the debatable things, the things that no one Scripture can prove without stretching it a bit. Give people a break. They are answering to God. Jesus died for them. We must not judge them or despise them.

Oh, and one more thing Paul adds,

“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Through the years we have all become acquainted with the idea that two judgment scenes are in our future. One for believers, one for unbelievers. The context here points to the first judgment, when we leave our bodies or our graves at the return of Christ. At some point after that there will be

a serious confrontation with the Lord of the Church, when all these matters will be set straight. Rewards will be issued to faithful servants. Well-dones. Eternal happiness at having served Jesus well.

But the negative flavor of this passage lets us know that some negative things are coming too. "Saved as through fire" says Paul in 1 Corinthians 3. Entering in by the skin of our teeth. Grace says we shall be there. But usage of that grace or lack thereof will be on display before the entire assembled church on that day. Honor for some. Shame for some. If we could only keep before our minds today, what tomorrow will be with Jesus, we would live differently, yes? Oh, yes!

Paul also mentions this particular judgment in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad... knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."

"Men" will experience even more terror at the end of the Millennium when they shall be judged eternally for their response to Jesus Christ.

For now, the terror is sufficient for His body. Things we did. Things we didn't do. Successes. Failures. The records will all be there. Sins, we assume, will have been blotted out. But service and its lack will be on the record books, books that will be opened. A terrifying time for those who played away their Christian life on things that didn't matter. Who built combustible materials on the wall when gold and silver and precious stones were needed.

Paul bolsters his point by a passage talking about judgment in general, for, one way or another, we are going to be judged.

14:11

“For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’”

That’s Isaiah 45:23, in part. Though we can speak of two separate judgments, every human being is destined to bow the knee and speak the truth. For some, too late. For all, a time of trembling, I believe, though in the case of men like Paul I see a preparedness that alleviates such fear. Paul expected not only a judgment of his works, but a vindication of them, a crown that would signal full acceptance by the Judge, full and abundant entrance into the coming Kingdom.

The passage from which this quote is drawn has Isaiah seeing two groups of people also. In verse 22 God claims His sole authority over all, the basis for the bowing and confessing to come. In 23 He turns that statement into an oath which He swears by Himself, since there is no one greater He can swear by. He swears that all will bow and confess.

In verse 24 God speaks of those who can declare that they are indeed righteous, made so by the Lord’s righteousness. They will bow and confess gladly and with God’s strength.

But in that same verse are those men of earth who will come before God in shame, men who are angry with God, men whose judgment is clearly, manifestly just.

Verse 25 returns to God’s people Israel, the true people of God of all ages who will be justified at last and glorified, as Paul indicates in Romans 8.

These latter, as we have said, will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ as the victor in an old Roman athletic contest, to receive the reward for a race run well. Paul was ready for that day. Surely many others have been ready too.

Oh that we all had such confidence! And oh that we realized the truth of the next verse, all of which is spoken in the context of accepting brothers in the Lord of all stripes:

14:12

“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Here the Isaiah prophecy takes a specific shape. We bow. We confess Christ to be Lord of all. We glory in Christ’s righteousness in us. And we begin to explain to the Lord what we did and why we did it.

Have you rehearsed for this meeting? Have you ever tried to put on paper what you believe you have done for the Lord and why? It is a meaningful exercise. God will have you on a series of thought processes and Scriptures as you lay it all out before Him. But whether you do it now or not, know for certain that there is a day coming when you will speak before the Lord the justification of your life and service.

Are you looking forward to that day? Will it be a Nehemiah time? A time when you say to him as Nehemiah did in fully good conscience, “Remember me Lord, for good”?

We must remember one more thing here. It’s not just that he will be looking at the number of souls saved, the number of sermons preached, or songs sung, or verses memorized. Things we consider to be “ministry” related. The verse says we will give account of ourselves, our very selves. Our thought processes. Our attitudes and actions toward family and friends and neighbors.

We need to keep all this in mind, says Paul, next time we belittle a brother, or refuse him fellowship, or judge him in some way.

14:13

“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore. But rather resolve [judge] this...”

The King James shows the two meanings of the word *krino* in Greek, as it should. The word is used twice in this short space, with totally different ideas. The underlying thought of *krino* is to distinguish, or decide between two options. It is translated a number of ways, from condemning, as in the first usage here, to simply resolving, as in the second.

No more condemning your brother, says Paul. And as we have indicated, this must have been a serious problem in Rome, with its influx of so many different cultures from Pagan to priestly. Multi-cultural churches can and must take from these verses a guideline for operations. Nothing seems worse to Paul than a divided church, especially one divided over non-essentials.

Stop condemning, but make a resolution to yourself and before God...

“not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”

“I promise myself, I have decided, this is my resolution: I will never ever say or do something that would somehow hinder my brother’s progress in the faith.”

“An occasion of stumbling or a cause of offense” is how the Greek reads here. Synonyms? Or is Paul listing two different things that need to be avoided?

I believe he is merely covering his bases. There are things that offend but that don’t bring about serious results. Other things cause a complete fall, at least temporarily.

You are visiting the home of a brother in the Lord with you wife. The sisters are in the kitchen preparing the food. Your wife opens the

refrigerator and sees some beers and wine. She says nothing but tells you about it later.

A truly weak brother could suffer a serious setback from such a discovery. The Enemy could bring into the mind a series of possibilities. These people are not saved. Yet they are so good otherwise. Maybe there's not so much to the faith. Maybe people can be good without God and the church. Maybe I should get a bottle of something.

Which can lead to drunkenness etc etc.

Another brother, much stronger, may be offended by the bottles, but shrug it off, and go home and pray about it. Offense does not necessarily lead to a stumble. Paul says cut out both possibilities. You never know who is looking. Be careful.

Is that bondage? Paul will now go on to call it love.

14:14

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus..."

We get convicted of the Lord Jesus/the Holy Ghost by reading or hearing the words of the apostles. Paul got his convictions directly from the Lord by revelation. This is the difference between what went on in the first century and what goes on now.

People in our day get ideas. Ideas that are strong. So strong that the people are convinced that they have heard from God. And without running their idea past the established leadership, they begin telling others what "God told them." This is what has created the present state of chaos in the church. The book of Judges mentality that everyone does and says what he thinks is right, without any word from God.

The apostles spoke what Jesus gave them. We must speak what they were given, not what we are given. The foundation cannot be laid again!

So what was this word from Heaven to Paul?

“that there is nothing unclean of itself.”

Paul, like Peter, would indeed have had to hear directly from Heaven on this one. Consider the huge number of chapters in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers regarding what to eat and what not to eat.

And do remember that the context is eating, specifically the religious prescriptions of various religions, even including Judaism. “Nothing unclean of itself” will certainly be stretched by amoral people to include adultery and perversion and drugs etc

But how could God, some reason, in regards to Jewish prohibitions, have been so adamantly opposed to certain foods in the days of Moses, yet now so easily accepting of those same foods?

Before we attempt an answer, it is important to know that we are asking the right question. If this passage only applies to meat sacrificed to idols, as some future verses will involve, then talking about Moses’ restrictions will not be profitable. But this is not the only passage that says essentially what Paul is saying.

Consider Peter’s heavenly vision. A sheet full of unclean animals, and a command to eat them. Peter’s denial. God’s convincing him by a second and third vision. Peter knew this to mean he was to accept Gentiles. But did he not also get the hint that Jewish dietary laws were passing away with the rest of the law?

Consider the words of Jesus: (Mark 7:15) “There is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him.” You are not made spiritually

bad by physical food. Another clue that the rules of Moses were temporary and for a reason beyond salvation.

Elsewhere Paul says (1 Timothy 4:3-5) "God has created all foods to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected... it is sanctified by means of the word of God [God said, It is good!] and prayer."

For the Christian, no creation of God is bad. There are concoctions and distortions of man that will destroy health and kill you. But the creation is good.

Then why Moses? And why the change?

It seems clear from the above statements from Jesus and Paul that what Moses gave to the children of Israel was for them and temporary. That much we know. Not as clear is the "why"? If something is bad, is it not bad for all time? To this day, Jews and Muslims too, will not eat pork.

Could it be that God was simply enacting rules of safety in a culture where proper preparation and preservation of foods was not yet possible? Pork, for example, is known to be a seriously dirty food, until it is processed by those who know what they are doing, cooked properly, etc.

God was not calling a pig spiritually unclean or a worthless creature. He was just pointing out that His particular purpose for creating pigs involved some lack of sanitary considerations. He knew His people would be better off staying away from this disease-prone creature.

He did not suddenly label a part of His own creation as evil, when He had already called it good. The change we must address is not the change from Moses to Christ, but the change that took place before Moses. Paul is returning to the creation in this matter as Jesus returned to the creation in discussing marriage and divorce.

From the beginning it was one man, one woman. Period. And from the beginning, Pigs and all animals were good. They are still good. But they are still dirty and tend in their dirtiness to pick up diseases that they pass on readily to humans.

There may be other reasons, but this one stands out to me.

And of course, Paul was indeed talking about meat sacrificed to pagan idols when he said there is nothing unclean of itself. We will save discussion of that until it comes up later.

He goes on to tell us how a clean thing really can become an unclean thing, even now, in our day:

“but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

This brings us back to verse 5, where Paul tells folks who are struggling about which day is to be the special one, “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.” The conscience is to be the guide, but the conscience must be fed new information to be currently helpful.

Some have not fed their conscience with any new Biblical truths for a long time. Rather they hang on to teachings they received in Sunday School forty years ago, and that info may have come from a bad source.

Think about the things you consider “clean” or “unclean”, good or bad, right or wrong. Do you have a clear Biblical justification for all your beliefs? Is your conscience merely a reflection of the Word of God, or a reflection of your own system of thought?

More importantly in the passage before us is not your own system but the system of your brother. I am not aware of any two Christians whose belief systems match exactly. We all grow, and we grow at different speeds. Your brother may have picked up some bad info early on. Short of

convincing him of his error, which is usually impossible at least in the short term, how are you going to deal with such a brother?

You know nothing is unclean, in the context of foods and days and other externals. Your brother has not yet come to that conclusion, but has a list of things he cannot eat or do. How do you deal with him? That's the topic to the end of this chapter and well into the next. Again, it must be serious to take up so much of the apostle's ink and paper.

To the free and easy among us, Paul has this stinging statement:

14:15

“Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.”

The first century situation is well known and we have spoken of it already. The pagans, as the Jews, offered animal sacrifices to their gods. And like the Jews, those burnt offerings were not thrown out, but eaten by the holy men, and sold in the marketplace. So you could go to your local first-century Jewel or Krogers and buy several pounds of meat that was considered edible, but holy food. You took it home, perhaps offered some required prayers, and you ate it. Every day of the week.

Fact is, that meat was no different than any other meat. Daniel and company would have none of it. He knew the rules of his God. But Peter was told, the rules have changed. And Gentiles who ate it all the time were now in the church eating it at the church suppers, next to Jewish converts who were revolted at the very idea.

Brothers were grieved. Paul says that means the eaters were not walking in love. They knew it bothered their brothers but to demonstrate their “liberty” they woofed it down anyway. Their mentality was “Get over it,” this is a new day. Freedom! No chains! No bondage!

But Paul says, “No love.” Insensitive. Free from the law but bound to your own liberty and totally blind to the people around you and their thoughts about life.

Are their substances today that “liberated” Christians partake of while weaker brothers take offense and even leave the church fellowship over it? Food? Music? TV or movies? Books? Let us examine our lives and see if there is something that goes into our body or mind that might be an offense to someone else if someone else knew about it. I daresay there are such things.

If so, the rest of this verse is for us:

“Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”

An interesting statement in the light of Paul’s earlier teachings about the elect of God and their security. How could I destroy someone that Jesus died for? Perhaps the answer is in the word used for “destroy”, *apollumi*. It is a strong word, and means what has been translated here, to destroy fully. Though the English word can mean, to put out of existence, that is not the primary idea. The basic thought is to ruin the structure. To shred. To tear apart.

Extinction is not taught for human beings. It is especially not taught for believers. Rather, a loss of reward, a burning up of activities performed for the church or the Lord, 1 Corinthians 3:14-15. There is a soul destruction and a body destruction, according to Jesus in Matthew 10:28.

Looking at this warning of Paul through the light of these other passages, it would seem that a “free” person who offends a “weak” person will cause that person to go into, or return to, a besetting sin. Alcohol comes to mind immediately.

As in the example above, a weak brother brings his family to your house and sees there the bottle of beer or wine in your frig. Without saying

anything, he goes home with the thought, "If that brother is saved and can drink that drink, why can't I? He then begins to drink himself into disfavor with God and loses out on any possibility of a reward. His testimony is destroyed. His effectiveness is destroyed. Any chance of fruitful ministry is destroyed.

That is one way to offend a weak brother. The other is to use that liberty in such a way that the weaker one is incensed and leaves the church. He does not give up his beliefs about that thing that divided you, but now he has no prayer covering, no fellowship, no good word. Men like this are often taken in by the cults who major in minors like the right food and the right day.

Your disobedience to Paul on this matter can have eternal consequences. You are just trying to be free, and enjoying the liberty you have in Christ. Well and good. So it should be. But the reality of love forces us to yield some freedom.

14:16

"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil."

The meaning of this verse becomes obvious. You do not want to be known as the brother whose liberty led a person to lose out with God. That person was just following his conscience and you came along and made him feel bad about it. Or encouraged him to give up his belief and join your liberty, before he was ready to do that. Then he fell, and great was his fall, as many will testify.

And as the stories go buzzing around the church, the question will inevitably surface: I wonder what happened to Joe? He was walking with God so close. That's when your name will come up. You who were just being your liberated self, who convinced that man to be free like you. You, the man who destroyed a soul because you wanted to be free.

Some familiar words follow.

14:17

“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.”

The Christian life, a manifestation of God’s Kingdom on earth now, and/or the future life and qualifications for entrance therein, however you look at it, is not comprised of a series of rules. Again let us be clear here. There are God-made rules that cannot be broken and will not be when a man walks in the Spirit. But the context here is man-made rules, and rules that have been canceled out by God’s work in Jesus.

The definition of Christianity is not made up of the things we don’t do. As much as our carnal nature would like this, it is not so. And why does the old man enjoy rules? Not doing something is relatively easy. It is visible. Men can see how holy and righteous we are.

Consider the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable of Luke 18. Jesus picked on this religious class quite often, and we need to point them out too, as they are still with us. Their garments are different, and the names have all changed. They wear suit and tie and clerical robe and collar today. They have titles such as church member, deacon, elder, pastor. They are teachers and rabbis among us, but they are still here. When they are identified they need to be avoided.

Notice the religion of the Pharisee who prayed in this parable. Notice the things he did not do. He did not commit the sin of extortion, or cheating his fellow Jews. He did not commit adultery. He did not work for the Roman government as a hated tax collector. Twice a week he did not eat.

As a Jew, this Pharisee was a part of natural Israel, that considered itself to be the Kingdom of God on earth, much as certain religious institutions and denominations of our day. But he was not in God’s Kingdom at all.

Much closer to the Kingdom was the man standing beside him, a despised agent of Rome who suddenly realized his need of mercy and forgiveness and confessed it before men. If he continued in this posture, he became a Kingdom person, as described in the last part of Paul's thought.

"but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

To receive Christ's forgiveness is to be made righteous. God fills the forgiven man with His peace and joy and a lot more. That's Christianity. That's the Kingdom. Not, eating Moses' diet. Not, eating fish on Friday. Not, being a Sabbath-keeper. Not, keeping a list of "don'ts" or even "dos." The Kingdom of God is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is not the final manifestation of that Kingdom, only the beginning. But it is the Kingdom for now.

Men among us preach "Kingdom now" a little differently than this. A lot differently! They claim we are to take over the world for Jesus and hand it to Him as a gift upon His return. No such thought entered Jesus' mind. We are simply to preach, teach, and baptize. God then brings individuals here and there and everywhere into His Kingdom to work, and wait for His coming. It's always been simple, but the complicated agendas of zealous men would not point to simplicity.

14:18

"For he who serves Christ in these things..."

These things? What things? The KJV and NKJV rightly translate *toutois* as the plural of "this", with an ending that implies "things". Not sure it is safe to gloss over that idea and say "in this way" as many modern translations have it.

Still, the meaning is nearly the same. The "things" Paul refers to are probably the entire set of practices that should be applied to a weaker brother. In other words, it is not serving Christ to reject any true brother.

It is not serving Christ to condemn or judge. It is not serving Christ to cause a brother to stumble or to argue a brother into conformity with your liberated thinking.

He who loves his brother as he ought to love him, says Paul, is serving Christ and

“is acceptable to God.”

That’s a serious thought, the opposite of which is that if we do not love our brother properly we are not acceptable to God. God does not disown His children, but His frown can make it feel like we have been cut off. The frown of God is to be avoided by loving the brothers. Not only that,

“and approved by men.”

Now Christians have been taught never to seek glory from men. Never to worry about whether the world accepts us or rejects us. It rejected our Master so we expect to be rejected too. But this is acceptance on a different level. MacArthur quotes here another of Paul’s words to illuminate this concept:

Philippians 2:15. God wants us “to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.”

We are to let our “lights so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.”

This is not about climbing the ladder of success and making it to the top of the mountain of entertainment, as some would have it. This is about being the man or woman that God created men and women to be, and stirring up even in the ungodly a remembrance of the holy image of God which was the original intention.

People will look at a loving church that has any number of diverse possibilities, getting along in peace, and say, Wow, there's something good about that group. Some will even give glory to God as they know Him.

It is one possible form of evangelism, viewed in this way. Remember that Jesus lived this exemplary life and yet was crucified. We do not pin our hopes of great success on living a godly life but obedience in this matter can have some far-reaching effects.

There are other thoughts that crowd into the apostle's heart, though his main argument has been made. Other ideas flow from the original. The discussion will continue for many more verses...

14:19

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace..."

"The things of peace" is the Greek original here. Just as the broader statement given elsewhere that to walk in the Spirit keeps us from walking in the flesh, by definition, so pursuing peace with God and our brothers will naturally knock out the warfare that is being experienced in the Roman church. Though this is high-sounding, it is meant to be obeyed. And how can such an injunction be followed? What does pursuing "things of peace" look like?

I can only imagine. And it is easy to make rules for those about whose conflicts I know nothing experientially. But suppose the "stronger" brother would invite the "weaker brother" to his home for fellowship, eliminating from the menu anything that could be offensive? The invitation could work the other way also.

What if a Jew and a Gentile could work together on the same committee?
What if the two groups could join together in evangelistic outreaches?

Music? There are many ways that a church fellowship can provide for those in disagreement to find the unity of the Spirit.

What if those who are schooled in Paul's teachings could be ready to voice concern if they see animosity arising? What if some could take a weaker brother under their wings if they see him hurt by church bullies? What if the bullies could be confronted separately?

Pursuing peace can be a creative exercise for mature believers who see with Paul's eyes the dangers of division...

Not only is peace to be pursued, says Paul. He goes on to add,

"and the things by which one may edify another."

That is, your dealings with your brothers up to now have been a bit destructive. You have leaned on your own understanding of things and hurt your own family members. Now you must find ways to build them up.

Every brother is gifted by the Holy Spirit. Work with brothers to discover their gifts and offer them to the Lord in the local church. Let them come to church knowing they truly are a part of things. Introduce them to others proudly and happily. Never speak ill of them behind their backs. Bring your doubts about them to the Lord only.

In building others, many find that the Lord is building the builder. It's part of the miracle of being a Christian. The adage, "What goes around comes around" is not the world's. It's ours. We say it like this: "Whatever a man sows he shall reap."

3:20

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food."

In verse 15 Paul has admonished the believer not to destroy an individual believer with his food. Here he expands things to the possibility that a person could destroy the work of God in the same way.

God's work among us is the building of a holy Temple to Himself, with believers being individual stones. Paul sees that theoretically the stone that you dislodged in some way from the building could have an effect on the stones around it. If the puncture is severe enough one can imagine a whole section of wall having to be patched up or rebuilt. There are consequences for our disobedience. I believe the point is made.

“All things indeed are pure...”

Back to the creation idea originated in verse 14. “There is nothing unclean of itself.” Paul agrees with himself here and with anyone in the church who has reached this conclusion. Surely everything God made is good...

“but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.”

Meaning, if you know – and Paul is now giving them that knowledge for which they are responsible – that eating a certain kind of food will offend your brother, stop eating. Otherwise, as he already has said in verse 16, your innocent behavior will be spoken of as evil.

Paul covers this entire subject for the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 8, the entire chapter. Here is his argument from that letter, paralleling Romans.

- Most every Christian knows idols are nothing.
- Knowledge puffs up.
- Love trumps knowledge.
- Not everyone knows what you know. Some have a weak conscience regarding idols.
- In fact it doesn't matter if you eat or do not eat.
- But beware lest your liberty is an offense to a weaker brother.

- What if the weaker brother is emboldened by your liberty and defiles his conscience?
- Your knowledge and liberty could cause a weak brother, for whom Christ died, to perish.
- You sin against Christ when you sin against a weak brother.
- Better to abstain from questionable things the rest of your life than cause a brother to stumble.

The next verse in Romans sound very much like the last verse in 1 Corinthians 8:

14:21

“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”

Pagan idols do not bother us today. But there are certain foods and drinks that do. We have discussed this already. The eating of meat in our own day is condemned by vegetarians as being somehow harmful to the body. But God allowed it and still does. There are certain meats, though, that would be best avoided when around Orthodox Jews and Muslims. Pork, especially. Liberty allows it. Love says, you can do without.

The drinking of certain wines would be considered a pagan practice of idolatry. In our day it is a matter of drunkenness, self-control, debauchery. Medicinal wine is recommended by Paul, and moderation is always commended by God. But once we tell God’s people to take it easy on their drinking, should we not add also that gluttony is a sin among us? Obesity, disease, and early death all come from gluttony. But pulpits are strangely silent.

The drinking of wine or any alcoholic substance has long been canceled out as a necessity for the Christian church. Juices and a host of other non-alcoholic drinks abound. Wine is simply not necessary, and can easily be

an offense to one striving to live a holy life full of the Holy Ghost. Love and common sense would seem to demand the cessation of alcoholic imbibing. Is it such a sacrifice?

Paul adds, “nor do anything”. We covered this already. This passage allows us to take in a number of activities and practices that could potentially cause a brother to stumble. Movies. Books. Restaurants that sell alcohol. Dance. Modern music. Immodest – in his eyes – clothing.

We hear cautions in our day about allowing the weaker brother to bring us into bondage. That is, should I totally bind myself to my brother’s weakness and give up every possible liberty I have just because he might be troubled by it?

A tricky question that is not addressed by Paul, and his silence itself should be part of the answer. Obviously the weight is heaviest on the “strong” brother. Paul was strong in this way, but vowed he would not eat certain foods the rest of his life if it would cause his brother to stumble. Once we have gained as much love as had the apostle, perhaps then we can ask this question.

If we were to enter the mission field, in a culture totally foreign to the West, would we not be willing to change our lifestyle radically? So many have. Is this not a similar issue? Are the weak brothers around us not a type of mission field for us? Are we willing to live for them and not for ourselves?

We understand that some brothers are too weak for too long. We are not advocating that they stay that way. Through prayer and gradual teaching – not confrontation – many of these brothers can be brought out of their beliefs. But until they are, what is the price we are willing to pay to be sure they are welcome in our fellowship?

14:22

“Do you have faith?”

Of course you do. Paul is talking to the church here. He knows they believe. He knows many of them have been liberated by the One Who truly sets free. But knowing that, he adds,

“Have it to yourself before God.”

Context here. He is not talking about saving faith or faith in the Word of God. He means, Do you have faith that you are free to, for example, go to movies? Well, find a way to do that, if you are sure Christ allows you, in a way that your brother is not offended. Perhaps a private showing in your home, as technology now allows.

Love to dance? Dance with your wife in the privacy of your own home. You play cards? That also can be done in such a way that no one is offended.

I use the above only as examples. There may be a brother reading now who is seriously offended by those examples. I ask you, brother, to return the love that many of your brothers are showing to you by keeping some things out of your field of vision. No one is claiming these questionable things are good or bad, only that some brothers feel free to do them. And you must accept these people as your own, as people for whom Christ died. If you feel they have taken liberty too far, you must pray for them as they pray for you. God will expose the hearts of all of us one day.

“Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

The Bible does not make lists of approved and unapproved items, except where clear sin or specific doctrine is concerned. We are left to make our own judgments on a host of matters. That’s the essence of liberty, and one way God uses to test our love.

This principle is vital to the discussion. “Liberated” brothers are so happy and free in the Lord that they just feel they can do a lot of things that others are convicted about. Their conscience simply does not bind them in any way about these matters. We hear them talk about where they have been and what they have done, and sometimes we wince. But in many cases, they are not bothered at all.

And we, if we are of the weaker sort, begin to question their faith. We call them worldly. Compromised. Fleshly. Carnal. We in fact judge them. But the man himself does not feel any judgment on him at all. He is just enjoying life freely now. He’s happy.

Paul simply wants that man to now be sensitive to those who cannot see life yet the way he sees it. He lets the free man know that, even though he does approve of certain things rightly, his own personal approval is not the final word. That thing he approves of might bring a brother down. So, when necessary, let that liberty be tempered with wisdom, even privacy. Love for the brother is more important than your personal freedom, as he has already established.

One other way to look at this idea meshes it more perfectly with the following verse. That is, happy is the weak brother who, seeing a strong brother partake of something, does not approve of something too quickly and defile his conscience before he has studied the matter through and given that conscience time to adapt.

14:23

“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat from faith...”

The doubter would be the weak brother here, it seems. And you, the strong one, the free one, have made him doubt. He was convinced he should not eat meat sacrificed to idols, for example. Then he sees you eating it. A question is placed in his mind. And before he has a chance to

study the issue fully, he merely follows your example. But he's not totally sure. His conscience has not had a chance to catch up to his new idea. He is not eating with a strong conviction backing him up. He might be right, he might be wrong, but he wants to be free as so many have told him to be.

But he is condemned inwardly nonetheless.

"for whatever is not from faith is sin."

If one's motivation to action is based on anything than a clear conviction based on God's Word and fortified by God's Spirit, it is a sinful motivation. Perhaps it is pride, trying to keep up with the spiritual "Joneses." Perhaps it is fear and guilt that one is not free enough.

Weak brothers are not therefore enjoined to stay weak. They should be encouraged to study the issue, and re-form their conscience. But until they do, they must not budge from their current conviction. Let no doubt remain when making serious changes like these.

As we enter the 15th chapter we do well to understand that Paul did not write by chapter, he wrote by topic. And this topic does not end until the 13th verse of that chapter. It will be clear as we approach verse 1 that Paul has not changed the subject.

15:1

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak..."

"Then" tells us that Paul is forming an idea based on what he has already said. Because there is a difference of opinion on certain matters, and because men base their opinions on what they believe to be the will of God, because they are performing their works to the Lord, because we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, because Jesus died for our brothers, because there is nothing unclean of itself, because the

Kingdom of God is about much greater things, because we might destroy a man by demanding he change too quickly, therefore we who are strong ought to deal properly with those who are weak.

“Scruples” here is “infirmities” in the KJV. The two ideas are related in the Greek by the idea of weakness. One who is bound to a particular conviction that inhibits his action is said by us to be scrupulous. These inhibitions are viewed as a weakness. Often it may be difficult to draw the line between scruples and doctrinal convictions, which likewise can and must inhibit the true believer.

But it is true, and Paul is speaking to this issue, that too many men have too many inhibitors. We want them to be free from things God never said or is saying no more in our day. But while they are in their present state, we are to bear with them, in the ways he has already pointed out in the previous chapter.

“and not to please ourselves.”

This is about love vs selfishness. The opposite of being sensitive to the scrupulous is pleasing self. Paul says that when we see an inhibited brother, we must for his sake practice inhibition ourselves, not for the same reasons as the weak, but for love’s sake.

15:2

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

Paul’s references to “one another” in verses soon to come lets us know that he has not changed the subject here. That is, he has not switched from our attitudes toward brothers to our attitudes towards the secular world around us. The Greek word for neighbor includes anyone who is our fellow or one near to us. We use the term to suggest someone who is near physically, as in next door, but not necessarily in faith.

No, this is still about church relationships. And the conversation has turned from nearly a defensive position, “Don’t offend your weak brother” to the active and positive idea of deliberate pleasing of a neighbor. This is not merely about hiding that bottle of wine any longer, this is about finding ways to lift up a brother who needs that lifting. This is about building up someone who until now may have been put down or eyed with suspicion. Please him. Build him.

15:3

“For even Christ did not please Himself.”

Now we have the picture that is in Paul’s mind when he tells us to please someone else rather than please one’s self.

Christ truly wanted to save us. There was a joy that was set before Him. No one is questioning that. But let’s be real. Earth, as we see it now, or as Jesus saw it then, is not Heaven. The body with which Jesus clothed Himself was not of the glorified stuff of which Heavenly beings are clothed. Being raised in the home of a carpenter is not the same as the lavish lifestyle He enjoyed with His true Father. Being doubted and opposed was not a part of the Heavenly way, where the Word was with God and was God. No real place to lay His head here doesn’t match up with the descriptions of Immanuel’s Land that He left behind.

Being nearly thrown over a cliff by those who knew Him best. Being betrayed by His own familiar friend. Being arrested in the middle of the night. Being mocked by an earthly king and his soldiers. Enduring a beating. Carrying a heavy cross up a hill. Being nailed to that cross. Those are not things whereby we can say Jesus was pleasing Himself. In all of that he was living for us, trying to please us, attempting to build us up.

And that is the pattern Paul lifts up for the church at Rome and the church of all ages. Here he brings in David: (Psalm 69:9) “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”

Ultimately people do not like God. Unable to hurt God in the heavens, they take out their wrath on those who represent Him on earth. This is what David experienced, in part, but as Paul will explain, those Old Testament words have New Testament ramifications.

15:4

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning...” It’s as though Paul were saying, I know this verse is out of the Old Covenant, but in a unique way, God has ordained that things that happened to Old Covenant people can relate to us in the New Covenant times. The passage he just quoted was first applied to David, for it happened to David, but it happened in its fullness to Jesus. And bringing it to the present, this same verse applies to us.

Modern interpreters of the Scripture need to be cautious about applying every Old Testament passage to Christ, and especially to themselves. The church is to be led by the Holy Spirit in its interpretations. And individual interpreters are not qualified on their own to come up with personal applications anywhere they please. But even with that warning we must agree with Paul that there is much in the Jewish books of Scripture that applies to us. Our God has not changed His ways.

“that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

Christians have many sources of hope, from the very presence of God Himself in us, to the fellowship of believers, to the multitude of pages of Holy Writ. But what does he mean by the “patience” of the Scriptures? “Comfort” I think we understand. The Word is a constant comfort to those who read and apply what they have read. But “patience”?

The Greek interlinear has it “endurance.” Footnotes say “perseverance.” But the issue is the article. It sounds as though Paul is saying that the

Scriptures themselves have patience when we say the phrase, “the patience of the Scriptures.” Interestingly, the interlinear Greek translation of the Textus Receptus does not use the article. Nor does the KJV. The NKJV adds an article to patience, but not to comfort.

Seems like, if we are going to pick and choose, there is more sense to adding the article to comfort: “We, through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures...” In other words, we are the ones with the patience, the Scriptures are the source of the comfort. Every other translation I read came up with this solution.

Lesson from this digression: Greek articles vs English articles have to be handled carefully. There is no perfect match-up. In this same passage, vs 7, Paul mentions that Jesus has received us to the glory of God. But in the Greek, “the” is absent. We insert it for clarity. Same with the truth of God in the next verse. Verse 12 talks about “the” root of Jesse, but this is translated “a” root in the KJV. And so on.

This verse merely tells us that we must continue on patiently being comforted by Scripture, and through this process, hope will emerge in our lives.

The only possible thought we might add here is that the stand-alone NKJV was thinking of the Scriptures as being enduring. Thus, the endurance and the comfort of the Scriptures would make sense. Notice that the two nouns are repeated in the next verse. God is both enduring and comforting, as are the words of Scripture.

15:5

“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,”

Perhaps this is Paul’s first attempt to end his long letter. A blessing. A prayer. The God of patience and comfort is the author of those Scriptures

He has just mentioned. When we endure and are comforted by the “Book” we are really being made to endure and experience comfort by God Himself.

May this God make you likeminded toward one another. Likeminded needs notice here. The Greek reads “the same thing to mind with one another.” A little awkward in English. Three separate Greek words are used here, combined into one English word. The thought, “to be of the same mind”, to be in harmony, to be in unity.

This was truly a divided church. The Jewish and pagan cultures clashed within the walls of the church of Rome. Today Jewish believers quite often form their own congregations so that they can be freely who they are. But these folks are quite open to the unity that is in Christ. They have no problems visiting a “Gentile” church. It’s a matter of preference, not of division, that separates them to their own ways.

Paul goes to great lengths to show the Jewish and Gentile involvement in sin. The Savior who died for both cultures. He demands that those who have not yet experienced full freedom in Christ not be treated in any second-class way. The whole letter is geared toward bringing the factions together “according to Christ.” That is, do what Jesus did.

Jesus brought a group of men together who were seriously diverse in political persuasion, employment, religious expression, but made them one. More than that, his death was for all who believe in Him from every culture. Knowing what he set as an example and what He did to affect this unity, let us yield to God’s administration of the oneness of the body of Christ.

And there’s a reason:

15:6

“That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The entire plan of salvation is for His glory. It’s not about us. It’s about Him. We certainly benefit now and for eternity, but the center of all is in Heaven. When we are united in praise to God in spite of our differences about this and that, God is glorified.

Thirty or so years after the words of Paul to the Romans would come John’s Gospel, recording words spoken nearly thirty years earlier by His Lord: (John 17)

“I... pray... for those who will believe in Me through their [the apostles’] word, that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You: that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me, and the glory which You gave Me I have given them ...”

Unity among us brings glory where it belongs, to God. We are not Jew and Gentile. We are not stronger and weaker. We are Christ’s united Body. With one mind and mouth we together glorify God.

15:7

“Therefore receive one another...”

Since unity has such a great outcome, let’s strive toward that unity. Make non-essentials, non-essentials. Your ethnic backgrounds don’t matter. Your religious backgrounds, likewise. Obviously skin color has no bearing on whether we receive or don’t receive someone. If God is going to be glorified, receive your brother.

“just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”

Look around the church. Look at all the different kinds of people claim rightly a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus, when He was here, invited

all kinds. Even though His mission was to the House of Israel, He often went beyond those borders and touched Gentiles. He called rich and poor to Himself. He hung out with the publicans and sinners. But He also chose Paul, a ruling class Pharisee of the Pharisees.

Christ received us. We can receive others. And he repeats the idea of verse 6, that doing this will bring glory to God.

The people of this world, by and large, don't understand this kind of unity and acceptance. They speak of being anti-racist, but they must pass laws to make unregenerate people get along. This is not to be so with us. The world is to see our love and marvel, and in many cases praise God for what they see.

Now it would seem that Paul returns to his original theme, to offer one last summary of what he has been bringing to the Romans, a message of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. If he can bridge this divide in the church, he will have accomplished much. And through the years, Christians have read these things, and the true ones have obeyed.

But a false church of Rome evolved years later, as the world, and even Rome itself, sadly recognizes today. Throughout the Middle, or Dark, Ages, the false Roman Church was the avowed enemy of Israel. Only recently has she offered to the world an apology for the atrocious crimes she committed against the seed of Abraham in the name of the Son of God.

But Paul, as the Lord, includes Jew and Gentile in the program of salvation.

15:8

“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God...”

“Now” could and probably should be “for” as nearly every translation today says, to keep up the flow of the text. “Accept each other... for Jesus has actually made Himself a servant to us all...”

Those who cringe a bit at the idea of Jesus being a servant (diakonos), need to recall the evening of the Last Supper, and see Jesus clothed in naught but a towel, washing dirty apostolic feet. This was not a mere ceremony, as some make it today. This was dealing where the feet meet the road. The condition of the human foot after a long walk on dirt surfaces is not a pretty one.

You can change the word to “minister” if you like, but that word implies today a certain power and prestige in the church. That’s not what Jesus was after; He already had that. He served us.

“The circumcision” is of course a reference to the Jew. If there is any question in Gentile minds that God loves Jews, it is erased here. Jesus accepted His people fully, and served them to the point of death on a cross.

Paul says that truth was at stake here. From the foundation of the world God intended to have a people, made up of Jew and Gentile. But specifically here in reference to the Jew, the plan was recorded in bits and pieces throughout the books of Moses and the other prophets and Psalmists. Jesus, the Truth, is on every page of the Old Covenant. The flow of salvation history demanded that Jesus come and do what He did. It had to end this way. Truth will conquer the lies Satan has sprinkled through the centuries.

Jesus came

“to confirm the promises made to the fathers.”

The fathers are usually considered to be the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. To Abraham, for example, was given the promise that

through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This was repeated to the others. Israel waited and waited but never saw this fulfilled. We now know that the coming of Christ into the earth and what He is doing in the hearts of men to this day is at least the beginning, the down payment, on that promise. One day Jesus will reign over all and the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled.

If by fathers we can also take in David and the prophets, the number of promises is multiplied. His death and resurrection and ascension and coming Kingdom are all detailed by the fathers of Israel.

Jesus, servant to Israel, is the confirmation of all these promises. Paul next goes on to include the rest of the people of God,

15:9

“and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy...”

Jesus became a servant to Jews to confirm promises made to Jews. But a secondary purpose for His coming was that Gentiles might enter the picture and have their sins forgiven also.

Now the Jews need to take a listen. Paul, the Jew, goes on at length here to quote Jewish verses that prove Gentile inclusion in the love of God. From the Psalms and Moses and Isaiah the apostle blasts away any anti-Gentile sentiments that may be lurking in the hearts of suspicious Israelites of that day and this:

“as it is written...”

This Psalm is recorded in the second history book called Samuel, 22:50, and repeated in Psalm 18:49. The author is the Jewish King David upon whom God could always depend when He wanted to bring a Spirit-led truth into the world. What did he say?

“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.”

Singing and confessing to Gentiles? Makes sense if you are David, the author of Psalm 18. The context of that Psalm is David’s, or rather, Jehovah’s, victories over nations that have risen or will rise against Israel. As David conquers a Gentile nation, He introduces the reason for that conquest: Jehovah his God, the only true God. The nations are forced to take notice, and bow down to this God.

Paul uses the Psalm to show more than conquest; it is God’s mercy that is on display. Those who have been spared God’s wrath, whether in David’s day or our own, need to bow down in humble adoration to a God whose justice demands that they all be massacred, but whose mercy has allowed them to live and call on His name.

Truly, Jesus Christ is not only a servant to the circumcision as in verse 8, but also to the Gentile. Another proof-text of the apostle is found far away in Jewish history to the time of Moses.

15:10

“And again he says: ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!’ ”

Interesting note here: David is speaking in the previous quotation. Moses is about to speak. Yet Paul says “he” to refer to both quotes. Meaning, it seems to me, that the “He” is the Holy Spirit.

A song of the great prophet Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy 32. It is not your romantic love-song, for sure. It is not the type of hymn we would sing in our church. It is a poetic recitation of the backslidings of the people of God. A people who had been brought by Jehovah out of a horrible bondage, preserved miraculously in a threatening wilderness, yet still complaining every step of the way, is told their past and their future. It is an unpleasant recitation.

God promises in Deuteronomy to provoke Israel by means of a nation that is not a nation. In fact it is many nations. It is the Gentiles. Gentiles will also be judged if they come against Israel, says Moses, but in the closing stanza of this masterpiece, Moses shouts what Paul here quotes,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people.” Though both groups will come under judgment for their sinful ways, both groups will also have reason to shout to God. Gentiles with God’s people the Jews become one in the thinking of the prophet and the apostle. That is the point he is trying to make.

15:11

“And again: ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!’ ”

A third quote to bolster his idea takes us back to the Psalms, in fact to the shortest of all the Psalms, number 117. The unnamed Psalmist simply shouts out a command to the nations of the earth, to praise God. No context. No introduction. Gentiles, you have something to be happy about! What could it be, but that many of them will be included in the Kingdom that is coming!

And finally he moves to the prophet Isaiah, a fourth witness to the fact that this people of God business is not limited to the Semites. It is very Gentile after all, and Paul, the apostle to those Gentiles, is here glorying in the fact.

The quote is from Isaiah 11: 1 and 10.

15:12

“And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a root of Jesse...’ ”

We know this verse applies to the Messiah. But let's pause a minute to look at that word "root." Does that make sense to you? Shouldn't it be "shoot" as in some footnotes? Paul is quoting a Hebrew text, and quoting it properly. The Hebrew word, according to Strong, does mean "root." In fairness though, the Isaiah text talks about a stem coming from that root.

What about Paul's Greek word here? Sure enough, the Greek word means root also. No variations are given in either language. A root is a root. The footnote people have it wrong. The Amplified, trying to help us ignorant folks with their "sprout" have it wrong.

The word is "root". And Paul has it that the root itself will spring up, though Isaiah seems to suggest the more conventional idea. But let's look at Paul.

Now, roots don't spring up from the ground. Roots have to stay in the ground to hold up the plant. Don't they?

Not if the root and the shoot are the same person. The One before Jesse. The One after Jesse. The One Who is forever the Vine of God, from everlasting to everlasting. He became human flesh and is related to Jesse in that flesh. But He is the eternal Son of God, so even though a root, He springs forth to reign over Jesse and David and all the Redeemed one day.

"And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles..."

The Gentiles? I thought the Jewish Scriptures foretold a Jewish Kingdom. Indeed, the Kingdom of God will be ruled by God's final Israel. We talked about the make-up of that entity, earlier.

So we have the ruling class clearly defined in Scripture. But here Isaiah and Paul declare that there will be a ruled class also. The people that remain after Jesus comes with judgment will get to experience first-hand a perfect government. Imagine it! No corruption. No elections. The King of all the earth will do right for one thousand years!

The meek Jesus and His meek people will inherit the earth and all its peoples, the ones privileged to enter that time period.

“In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”

Many Gentiles hope in Christ today. They have been given a certain expectation of eternal bliss with Heavenly beings. They have no sinful past to look forward to. All is forgiven.

There is another class of Gentiles that will see the Kingdom come. They will see how evil has been banished. How good it is when a righteous King rules. And year after decade after century they will have nothing but hope that all is going to be on earth as it was intended from the beginning. Right will be right. And those who try to do wrong will be justly dealt with. Paul now wished this hope on his readers:

15:13

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing...”

You can feel the excitement in the room where Paul is writing this classic document. He has plowed through the darkness of man’s sin, dealt with troubles in the Roman church, and now he breathes in the joy of Heaven as he contemplates what is coming to this planet. For him, in just a few short years, all of these things he has mentioned will be personally his. He can see it as if he were there. And he yearns for such joy and peace that comes from believing the Gospel, to be with his readers,

“that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Hope. The hope that Gentiles will have throughout the Millennial period is available now. The God of hope will make you abound in hope. Heavenly-minded people are not worthless after all. They see things we cannot see.

They hope in what cannot be seen. But their hope and their faith will become sight by the Spirit's working in their lives.

With this prayer Paul ends the main content of the letter, again. Doctrine established. Practical living in the church, established. He will now talk of more personal things. His plans. Greetings. But even in these matters, the great apostle can be very helpful to our lives. Let's keep listening.

15:14

"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness..."

Not only will God fill you with joy and peace, you already have goodness." Paul has come down hard on mankind in his letter. Jews. Gentiles. Strong Christians lording it over weak ones. Division. But see here the other side of this stern follower of Jesus.

He knows that if the Spirit of Christ is in them, they have all the goodness they need. Not only that, they are

"filled with all knowledge..."

The Christian lives in a world of mystery. Technically speaking, as John tells us later, we have no need that anyone teach us. We have it all, somewhere inside of us. Yet, the teacher is a gift to the church. The apostles were forever teaching, Paul and John being no exception. Pastors are teachers. The Scriptures are teachings, doctrines that we are to absorb. The commission tells us to make disciples, learners, of the nations. Everything Jesus commanded the apostles is to be taught to us.

"able also to admonish one another."

You could be doing what I am doing, says Paul, and from now on you will. I have passed on my heart to you, now pass these words on to the church

as it grows there in Rome. You don't need me to be there, though I intend to visit. Just use my words and the words of the other apostles of Jesus and you will be able to teach and warn and correct each other.

Still there were some things he felt compelled to address in this letter, and we're so glad the Holy Spirit in him had him write these things for us.

15:15

"Nevertheless brethren I have written more boldly to you on some points..."

The Gospel already came to you. Your church is established. You have teachers there. But I sense from what I have heard that there was something lacking in what you have received so far. There are some things going on and some teachings going around that let me know that I need to complete your knowledge. You may have received some of this before, but something didn't gel with you.

Somehow you did not have a full sense of how evil is the human race, how lost without our message. Somehow you did not see the plan of God to save an elected people. You did not understand that strength in knowledge is not as important as strength in love.

Maybe you heard it before, but accept this offering

"as reminding you..."

If you heard it before, forgive me. But try your best to get it this time. These things are crucial.

"because of the grace given to me by God."

We all have our part to play in building up the body of Christ. Each of us apostles have a piece of the puzzle that you need to profit you. My

particular grace has been given to the Gentiles, and there are many Gentiles in your congregation. I know that my thoughts concerning the pagan cultures and their entrance into the church are going to be helpful as you struggle for the unity that is in Christ.

15:16

“that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles...”

There’s the word minister again. I say again, because the KJV uses that English word up in verse 8, speaking of the fact that Jesus has become, in the Greek, a servant to the Jewish people. This is in accord with Isaiah, who promised a suffering Servant would appear in the last days.

In verse 8, *diakonos*. But here a different word is used. The NKJV notes the difference by changing the English word from servant to minister.

Leitourgos is a public servant. This is the functionary of the Temple. One who does this or that service to God or man.

If we used this context only, look at what serving God means. Jesus is the lowliest of servants. Paul recognizes he is not on that same level as the Lord, though he knows that this is the goal of all of us. Lowliness. Isn’t it abominable that the servants of Christ in our part of the world are striving for power and recognition and the public platforms, while Jesus looked for a cross and Paul sought out the low places?

So, Jesus came to the Jews and served them, verse 8. Then Jesus sends Paul to the Gentiles, to serve them.

“ministering the gospel of God...”

Good to be reminded that this good news was orchestrated by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. All that is God is involved in bringing good news to fallen man. And Paul recognizes that it is God’s grace on him that is bringing this message to the Romans. Then this thought:

“that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable...”

The KJV use of the word “up” after offering makes the thought more understandable. This is not an offering that the Gentiles are offering. It is the Gentiles that *are* the offering.

And who is offering this sacrifice? The context implies that Paul is speaking of himself.

We say that there are no priests any longer. But in fact, in Christ, all God’s people are priests, called to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. What each man offers up is between him and his God. Paul believed that he was to offer on God’s altar, all the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations of earth.

Though Peter opened the door to the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus about Peter being given the keys of the Kingdom, it was Paul who would be the designated “functionary”, priest, minister in God’s spiritual temple, that would complete this work.

Fellow-priests are the men who worked with him then, and countless missionaries and preachers and teachers through the years who would carry this Gospel, following his example, to all the people groups of earth. The Gentiles are still being offered up. God is still breathing in the sacrificial aromas He loves, as they are all

“sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

We offer up a soul here or there, and God makes that soul holy with His own Presence. The priesthood lives and flourishes. One after another, nationals around the world are laid on the altar and made acceptable to God.

15:17

“Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.”

Paul was very sensitive to the subject of glorying, or boasting. On the very next page of your Bible Paul is warning the Corinthians to glory only in the Lord, since we as a whole are such a base people, nothing in the eyes of the world. In 2 Corinthians 10:17 he uses the very same words (“He that glories let him glory in the Lord.”) borrowed from the prophet Jeremiah, in reference to various spheres of ministry.

Paul is painfully aware that what he is doing is being done by the Lord. Left to himself Paul would have been out rounding up Christians to have them imprisoned and slaughtered. Left to himself, how could he cast out demons and survive shipwrecks, and heal the sick, and know which towns and cities to enter, and all the rest?

But somehow the work of offering up Gentiles to the Lord was being done through him. He gloried in the Lord.

15:18

“For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me...”

An unusual outburst here, it seems. In verse 17 he is boasting in God. Here he stops short of his boasting, almost in fear. The two versions from the Textus Receptus seem to convey what the original Greek said: “not will I dare to speak anything of what not worked out by Christ by me..”

But most newer translations have offered an explanation of those words that helps us understand in plain English. Since Paul refuses to speak of things Christ has not done, that is, things that he may have done in his own power, the thought should run like this, as in the NASB:

“I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.”

How many braggarts could be persuaded to step down from their glory, if they would just say and believe what Paul is saying here? How many human innovations have come into the church, built the church to a great number, and therefore deserve the credit? How many churches are based on rich people giving huge donations? The church that money has built is scattered all over this nation.

But where is the church that Christ has built? Paul was working on that one in the first century, and he does not mention money in the building of it, as you will see...

“in word and deed...”

If any of my words or my actions were not guided by and filled with the Spirit, I will not speak of them. Only those words and deeds that were heaven-sent are the things God uses

“to make the Gentiles obedient.”

How does a mere mortal reach into a totally new culture and bring individuals inside that culture to obedience to the Gospel? There are many methods available. The mission fields of earth have seen them all by now. But only God’s methods are to be praised. Paul will have none of the human ways and means of preaching the Gospel. He now tells us what He is talking about, the only sure way of success from Heaven’s standpoint:

15:19

“In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...”

This is what he will glory in. He comes to a new area under the direction of God. He opens His mouth for the words of God to flow forth. While he

is speaking, God begins to show the people that what Paul is saying is true. Demons go. Bodies are healed. People realize this message of Paul is true, they believe it, and they are saved. A church is formed.

There has been left in the church a residue of this power. I personally have never seen a man who has the power of an apostle. But I have seen simple people offering simple prayers in simple faith, and having their wishes granted by the same God that laid this foundation of power in the first days of the church.

God is not dead. He still hears and answers His people. But the foundation of truth and power has been laid. People are being asked to come to Jesus Christ by this church, in faith in God's Word. God Himself manifests to these people, sometimes in a mighty way. The power of the Spirit of God is still with us, and we are called upon in this day of deception to be sure that our awareness of this power is real so as to defeat the counterfeits that seem to be showing up more and more often, robbing people of their money and often, their faith.

So Paul glories in God as a minister of Jesus to the Gentiles, and is offering the Gentiles up to God as his own sacrifice,

“so that from Jerusalem...”

This is where he started his ministry officially. According to Acts and Galatians 1, he spent time in Damascus after his conversion, then in the Arabian desert with God, as His Master was led into a desert after His baptism. Three years of desert seminary, then on to Jerusalem, to formally unite with Peter and James. He begins preaching in Syria and Cilicia, but the Judean churches were picking up the story that the great persecutor was now one of them.

“and round about to Illyricum...”

That's an uncommon name, for sure. It is used once in Scripture. A little digging lets us know that it is one and the same with Dalmatia, also used once in Scripture, 2 Timothy 4:10. Titus, a member of the apostle's ministry team, had gone into Dalmatia, presumably to expand the Gospel beyond where even Paul had ventured.

Wikipedia tells us that "Dalmatia was a Roman province. Its name is derived from the name of an Illyrian [think Illyricum] tribe called the Dalmatae, which lived in the central area of the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. It encompassed the northern part of present-day Albania, much of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. Not that long ago, we might have called this area Yugoslavia. Originally this region was called Illyria (in Greek) or Illyricum (in Latin).

It is over one thousand two hundred miles from Jerusalem to old Dalmatia. The fastest mode of transportation available to Paul was first-century sailing vessels. Over land there were animals, and walking. Yet this area was evangelized by Paul and company in a matter of a few decades of that first century.

It would be possible for modern evangelistic crusades to take place throughout that region in a relatively short time. Missionaries work throughout the region. But the world has changed and unfortunately the church has changed in its methodology.

The world is easily distracted. It has so many things to keep it occupied and turned away from the things of the spirit. Before modern transportation and communication and entertainment the arrival of a preacher in town could cause quite a stir. Not always a positive stir, but certainly the apostolic team was noticed when it came preaching about this Jewish Messiah.

Today the worst enemy the church faces in places like these is apathy. A total ignoring of God's people, except in Muslim and Communist-like countries, of course.

As for the church, it largely depends, as I mentioned earlier, on huge sums of money to get the work done. Paul has shown us that the early church depended on huge amounts of the Spirit of God. There was more fasting. More prayer. Therefore, more power.

And in the main, a better message, the message with which the church was entrusted,

“I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.”

Not a social Gospel: “let me help you get healthy and wealthy and powerful.” When Christ enters a culture, it does experience health and financial needs being met, and growth in a hundred ways. But Paul preached, and we must also, the Gospel. That’s what his life was about. That is what our life must be about, if we want the results Paul got.

See now another insight into Paul’s calling:

15:20

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named...”

Paul looked at his world and thought, there is so much ground to cover here, I must not spend time preaching this message where it has already been preached. Paul knew he was not to be a finisher, but a starter. The church needs both kind of people. There are the “apostolic” type (small a) who go into new areas and start new works. Then there are the “pastoral” types who see a fledgling work and have compassion on it as a mother bird over its nest. These people stay as long as they are needed to cause things to grow strong and straight.

In neither case is there room for the professional kingdom-builder. The growth of some churches is stunted by having on board a man who has

long out-lived his stay, and who feels the church will die out if he leaves. That talented man probably needs to move on once he sees the church is in order. And Paul gave Timothy and Titus (who were pastoral types) orders to ordain elders to take over the work as soon as possible. Then they could return to him for re-assignment.

I know there are variations on this theme through the years, but it is true that personality cults who depend on the one shining star to be their guide, often disintegrate when the star is snuffed out by scandal, or arrogance, or worse.

Starters, keep starting things. Finishers, get to the place where your gifts are needed. Establish the work. Replace yourself with a team of men. Move on. That was Paul's way.

"lest I should build on another man's foundation."

But don't we all build on someone else's foundation? Not if we are "apostolic" missionary types. Paul knew his ministry. He was to light fires, then pass the wand to someone who would tend that fire. Because of his particular calling, he found it abhorrent to stick around somewhere when the world's need was calling out to him daily. Through him and men like him, the Gospel was taken to the Roman world. Soon Paul would take this Gospel to the capital of that world. But he would be in circumstances that he had not foreseen as yet.

15:21

"but as it is written:"

See how every decision, every policy, every action, of this man is placed under the guidance of the Spirit-filled Scriptures. His life must line up with what the prophets of old said. The prophet he now quotes is Isaiah, again. His calling is to get the Gospel out to as many people as possible while he has life and breath so that Isaiah's words do become true:

“To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.”

That’s a bit puzzling at first. He is about the business of announcing the Gospel and letting men hear it in no uncertain terms. How could it be said that people will see and hear if they have not had that Gospel announced to them?

It’s a matter of timing. Those who have been in darkness throughout all these generations, say Isaiah and Paul, will now have a chance to hear the Good News that God is calling people into the Kingdom that once seemed to be exclusively for the Jewish nation. God is breaking down walls of partition and offering forgiveness of sin to Gentiles of every people group imaginable.

This indeed is fulfillment of prophecy and Paul is justified in seeing himself in the Scriptures, even as His Lord saw Himself in that other famous Isaiah reading that nearly got Him thrown over a Nazareth cliff in the beginning of His ministry. To say that you are fulfilling Scripture is a serious matter. But in those cases, a true matter.

You would expect the next verse to read, then, “For this reason I am on my way to Rome.”

Not quite.

15:22

“For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.”

What reason? It seems that he is speaking of his ceaseless efforts to be sure the Gospel is planted wherever he goes. I’ve wanted to visit you for a long time, but the work is pressing on me so much. Doors keep opening.

God keeps saving people in every city and nation. What an overwhelming task!

15:23

“But now no longer having a place in these parts...”

He is in the latter portion of his final missionary journey. He is in Corinth. The Gospel has been spreading throughout the Grecian peninsula, and Paul is sensing that his time there is about up. Not having a place speaks of opportunity and open door, not physical space. The mission of his life is starting to come to a conclusion, at least as far as mission trips like these. His next trip will be of a different variety.

“and having a great desire these many years to come to you...”

This is straightforward enough, I believe. Look at his heart again. Thoroughly given to the planting of the Message in areas, churches, and individuals, he still dreams of widening and widening the sphere of Gospel influence. His eyes are set on Rome.

Certainly there were people there he wanted to meet and greet. He had had indirect contacts with people. He wanted to meet them face to face. He wanted to share spiritual blessings, gifts, prayers, more teaching. He perhaps dreamed of this next peninsula over becoming a product of the Gospel in the way Greece and Macedonia have become.

15:24

“Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.”

Spain would be the Iberian peninsula, what we refer to as Spain and Portugal today. It is clear that the apostle had in his sights the western limits of that ancient world. He would touch on every peninsula that juts

into the Mediterranean. Turkey, or Asia Minor; then Greece; Italy; the Iberian peninsula.

We have here Paul's idea, not necessarily God's. Nevertheless the commentators are nearly unanimous that it is not out of the question at all that Paul did indeed make this journey. His journey to Spain, though it would be interrupted for several years by a stay in Roman custody, could easily have taken place shortly after his first release. His second imprisonment would result in confinement and beheading.

"For I hope to see you on my journey."

See then he would, as a prisoner of Christ. In the Providence of God, he would be able to have a house out of which to teach God's Word to all comers. We assume that many Roman Christians visited him there, and even responded to his missionary project:

"and to be helped on my way there by you."

Such boldness, but not like the swindlers of our own day, who do all they do for personal gain. Paul's eyes were on the souls of Spain. He had a mission to perform. Though money does not build churches, money does feed churchmen. It is altogether proper to support the man of God who cannot earn money in any other way.

Paul would not accept gifts from some churches, presumably poor and young in the faith. He would rather work for a living during certain periods of his ministry. Are there men among us like this today? I hear of them. But they are few. Much easier to negotiate with church officials for a comfortable living with all the Western amenities.

The laborer is worthy of his hire. That's Bible. But as with Paul, there must be times when God's men keep their hands off the money of the poor. How sickened we are to hear the stories of widows and the seriously ill who give their life savings away to TV charlatans who promise them

healing and blessing for the simple planting of a “seed” into their ministry. Shame!

“if first I may enjoy your company for a while.”

Another Greek awkwardness here. It reads originally: “if of you first in part I should be filled.” All the translators seem happy with the idea of “company” being added to the text. And if “company” then “enjoy” must be added too.

But the text simply says that Paul will be filled, or satisfied, by the Roman church. Yes, he is asking for an offering, but the clear message, unlike that of the thieves among us now, is that Paul desires the fellowship more than the finances. Let me get to know who you are. Learn who I am. Let’s refresh each other in the Lord, and if you can help me on my journey after that, that would be nice.

15:25

“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.”

Though the established church is in view in this verse, he is never far from thinking about his offering of the Gentiles. The ministry to the older saints, an offering for the poor and distressed of Judea, is going to be offered by the newer saints that Paul has been bringing to the Lord on his journey.

The determination to go to Jerusalem is recorded in Acts 19:21, while Paul is at Ephesus seeing the power of God displayed in unusual ways. “When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ ”

Yes to both. He would visit Jerusalem. He would then see Rome. But many surprises awaited him on both trips.

But first Jerusalem. MacArthur describes the situation that prevailed there in volume two of his Romans commentary, page 346. The year is A.D. 58.

“...the church in Jerusalem was suffering not only great persecution but great poverty. There was a famine throughout Palestine, and because of persecution by unbelieving Jews, many Christian men lost their jobs and many others were put in prison, making bad conditions still worse for their families...”

There is extensive treatment of the giving to the Judean church in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul, while “on the field”, is enlisting his new converts in a major push to bring relief to his brethren. We receive some of our best teaching on giving through this whole project.

1 Corinthians 16, the first few verses, also speak of this calamity in Judea. The passage we use to tell folks they should meet on Sunday, and take an offering when they do, is actually a part of Paul’s fund-raising campaign for Jerusalem.

He goes on here to recount some of the same story one will find in those other epistles.

15:26

“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia...”

The reference is to Paul’s mission stations and churches in the northern (Macedonia) and southern (Achaia) sections of the Grecian peninsula.

“to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”

Once the new believers heard there was trouble among their now-brothers in Palestine, they wanted in on the movement geared to relieve them. Paul encouraged this fellowship in the Gospel and became the

collector of the gift throughout the region. Bringing this sweet-smelling sacrifice to the very territory of the apostles would be one more way of proving to the old school, as it were, that the new believers were the genuine article.

15:27

“It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors.”

Them, they, their... gets a little confusing. It pleased the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia. They wanted to be involved. In Paul’s mind, if not necessarily in the hearts yet of all the new Christians, the new saints of Greece are in deep debt to the saints of the Holy Land. He explains:

“For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”

Now he speaks of all the new converts as Gentiles. And most are. Though it was always to “the Jew first” in synagogues scattered throughout the Roman world, the Jews by and large fought the message. But the “Greeks” were fascinated by this God who would come and die for them.

The spiritual things that the Judeans passed on to their Gentile counterparts include the Gospel, the Scriptures, the apostolic teams that scoured the area looking for souls, prayers, and financial support of the men who came and preached to them. It is not clear whether they felt indebtedness as much as just a Christian compassion for brothers and sisters in need, but both aspects were probably involved.

15:28

“Therefore when I have performed this...”

After I have gathered all these offerings, then traveled hundreds of miles to Palestine to deliver it to those in need, that is,

“and have sealed to them this fruit...”

Paul sees these contributions as concrete evidence of the solid character of his work. Those who spontaneously and sacrificially give of their hard-earned substance to bless people they don't even know, nor will ever meet on this side of glory, are showing the fruit of the Spirit of God in them.

After this is accomplished,

“I shall go by way of you to Spain.”

Paul seems set on this vision. Perhaps he has heard from God, though as we indicated, the journey will not be as he expected. But the plan is real: First, Jerusalem. Next, Rome. Finally, Spain. One day we must ask him if indeed it happened that way...

One other thing was certain to the apostle:

15:29

“But I know that when I come to you...”

When I come. More and more we sense the absolute confidence in Paul's mind that he is on his way ultimately to Spain, by way of Jerusalem and Rome. Not, “if” I come, but “when.” I am going to be in Spain, but when I come to you,

“I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.”

Yes, my mind is on my mission, but don't think I will short-change you in any way. I believe God has some wonderful things in store for you upon my arrival. Everywhere Paul has gone, he has been able to impart spiritual gifts, heal the sick, and all the rest. He is expecting the same in Rome.

Fast forward. Paul arrives in Rome as a prisoner. And we say, wow, he missed it that time. Totally defeated. How can he be an ambassador of the Good News he is preaching with those chains and those soldiers?

Relatively easy to answer. Consider Acts 27 and 28. Paul the prisoner foretells by the power of God that the voyage to Italy will end in disaster. And it happens. Paul the prisoner stops sailors from escaping the ship during the predicted storm. Paul the prisoner eats and drinks a meal and encourages the entire company of seemingly doomed passengers to relax. Paul the prisoner is so highly regarded by the centurion in charge that all the prisoners' lives are spared, when killing them during the dissolution of the ship would have been the proper thing to do, from Rome's viewpoint. Paul the prisoner is spared death after the lethal injection of a venomous snake. Paul the prisoner heals the father of the citizen of Malta who leads in the hospitality offered by this small island where Paul has shipwrecked. Paul the prisoner then leads a healing revival as other residents of the island want what Publius's father received. Paul the prisoner was allowed to live for two years under house arrest, preaching and teaching Jesus to all comers.

I know of no free men who are as powerful as the prisoner Paul was in those awful but very productive days of his life. He came in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

And there is another way that comfortable Westerners need to look at this story. In the first century, persecution was not considered unusual, or an interruption. It was the norm under which all ministry took place. Paul could not imagine for himself or any of us a life without persecution. He himself said, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Peter and John rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name. Persecution is not a mark of God's disfavor, but of His acceptance of you. It means you are living right, saying the right things, telling the truth. For the world and its devil hate truth.

Paul to the Philippians in 1:29, “For to you it has been given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Persecution suffering is as much a gift of grace as the original salvation Jesus gave you.

So when Paul says, though unaware of what is coming his way, “...when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ” was the Spirit in him prophesying that he would be coming to the Roman Church in chains, accompanied by soldiers? Something to think about.

One final plea will end the main body of the letter:

15:30

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit...”

A fascinating array of verbs has been used to translate *parakaleo*, including the old English “beseech”, which as many KJV words, needs a translation of its own into modern English: “to beg for earnestly.” The New King James modernizes it just that way. Also out there is “appeal to”, “urge”, and who knows what else.

The basic idea, per Strong, is “call near”, i.e. invite or invoke by imploration or consolation. Paul is seriously desiring his readers to do something here. Another variation is the preposition used before Jesus and the Spirit. “Through” doesn’t seem to do the trick although it is a possible translation. Rather, as in most, “by” or by means of, or in keeping with, because of...

I’m begging you, and so is Jesus Himself, and the very love of the Spirit of God demands this... what?

“that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me.”

Pray for me. Pray together. Bring the following needs before the whole church. It is unclear to me, and varied by the translators, as whether he was asking them 1, to struggle in prayer, as per Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis. I struggle in prayer. You struggle with me, and together we will let God know how serious are the matters I will list. Or 2, to join the struggle that I face daily in my ministry by praying earnestly. Either way, note the intensity of this man, the singlemindedness of his daily walk.

But it wasn't just "pray for me." When we ask someone to pray for us, we should be specific, and ask them to be specific. United prayers are effective in heaven, assuming the stamp of Divine approval is already on the request. No, it was pray for these three things. First,

15:31

"that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe,"

Paul knew very well about unbelieving Jews. He had not only been one of them himself, he was at one time their strongest voice. He knew the politics of the region, the emotion of these brethren of his, the determination someone could develop to wipe out the Christian name. He knew that he and his little band of preachers would not be able to withstand a mob of angry Jews in his natural strength. So he wants protection. He has a job or two to do and he doesn't want to be stopped. So he asks the team there at Rome to run interference for him in the Spirit.

Such wisdom. Would that we had the sense to keep asking church and family to pray for us in our daily endeavors. Private prayer is certainly helpful and required. But Lone Rangers in ministry, in prayer, even in Christian living, eventually run into crushing defeats.

So one wonders what happened in Judea? Certainly the Romans prayed for Paul. Yet Paul was arrested, tried, sent to Caesar, eventually sent to his death.

But he was delivered from the Jews, wasn't he? That's what he had asked. Acts tells us of the way Jews tried to stop him cold when he got back to Judea. But it was a Roman soldier that was God's instrument to answer Paul's prayer. He, Claudius Lysias by name, literally delivered Paul from a mob of angry Jews that wanted to tear him limb from limb. In a pattern that resembled that of His Master, Paul was delivered from Jews to be executed eventually by Romans.

What else was on Paul's prayer list?

"and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints..."

The reason he had to go back into danger was that offering to the saints. Of course, that could have been done by others, freeing Paul to head westward. But I believe Paul had other motives for wanting to deliver this sacrifice of love personally to the leadership of the Judean church, his fellow apostles. I believe Paul wanted them to know that his work had paid off. That there were believers scattered all over the Grecian world who understood the Gospel, who loved the brethren, who were growing in Christ. This was another way that Paul was "offering up" the Gentiles, and he wanted to be there when it happened.

We have no record of Paul laying this gift before the elders in Jerusalem. We read of the meeting in Acts 21, and the discussion of how Gentiles have come to Christ. The narrative goes on to tell of the plan of James and the rest for Paul to carry out certain measures to keep himself safe. These turned out to be the very measures that got him arrested.

We can assume that somewhere in that meeting, Paul rendered his "service for Jerusalem" and that it truly was acceptable to the saints. Relief is always acceptable. We can only imagine the rejoicing that took

place as Christians, hundreds of miles from their benefactors, heard of the way they were being loved.

But Paul has one more request, which is attached to the first two:

15:32

“that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”

This burden weighed heavily on Paul. Again we see similarities between his trip to Jerusalem and our Lord’s. Both had a heaviness about going there. Paul’s heaviness was not about to be released for some time. But he asks the Romans to pray that by the time he sees them, the burden will be lifted, and he will be filled with joy.

It is good that he adds, “by the will of God.” For as we have said many times now, his life was to take some twists that would threaten his outer joy. His desire for refreshment, fellowship with them after a long journey, was a normal thing to ask. He would have traveled over a thousand miles again! He would be weary after such a long journey, even under normal and favorable circumstances.

That which is coming to Paul is far from normal. Oh, he will need much refreshment. And when the brothers and sisters hear of his plight, that fellowship will be forthcoming. A steady stream of Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers, will be able to refresh Paul while he sits locked up in his rented house for two years.

One more blessing for the church:

15:33

“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

I see no reason to comment. And with that, the letter to the Romans is finished. Well, almost. It looked like it might end in 15:13, but it didn't. It seems to be over here. But Paul cannot put the pen down yet. A group of people suddenly want to be included in his greetings, and he wants to add a personal greeting to people he has met and/or heard of from the Roman church.

The catalog of names has, remarkably, caused a lot of discussions through the years. Though none of those discussions rise to the level of serious theology, they are of interest to the believer who enjoys everything Biblical. Let's take a look.

16:1

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister..."

Before greeting his acquaintances, Paul feels compelled to introduce his worthy messenger, a woman of high character who will serve the apostle by delivering this valuable document, his letter, to the Romans. Phoebe should have been honored through the centuries for this noble task. She is to be credited for putting the epistle to the Romans in circulation. From Rome it would be copied and passed on to the area and eventually the world. Thank you, Phoebe.

Unfortunately, that is not what Phoebe is known for. Due to the inroads of the women's liberation movement into the church, poor Phoebe has been arrested and made to testify on behalf of female leadership in the church. The first church officer. A deacon. No, a deaconess. Why, maybe the "minister" of the church, the leader... and so we have been off to the races ever since.

That she is a woman no one doubts. She is called a sister. That she was trusted and honored in her church, and especially by Paul himself, is not in question. A remarkable woman, no doubt. But the next clause in the

verse has given rise to a lot of speculation, and some false conclusions. Paul describes her as one

“who is a servant of the church...”

Servant. *Diakonos*. There it is. One word that changes everything in the eyes of those seeking for reasons to elevate females into power and authority. One lowly word that describes one lowly place in the life of the church.

What does it mean? Do we really want to know? It may be sad to hear Strong's *Concordance* tell us that *diakonos* is merely an attendant. A waiter. A menial servant. We take it from there, wresting it out of the Greek tongue and making *diakonos* a church officer. A minister. In some cases, a preacher. Yes, that one word is translated three different ways in your Bible: minister, deacon, and its original meaning, servant.

The English translators felt a need to communicate to readers the fact that something had happened to that word over the years, and that certain contexts demanded a certain meaning. When expressing the lowliness that Jesus intended for all His people, “servant” was used. But in reflecting the officialness of the idea, reinforced by Paul's own writings, “deacon” came into being, a transliteration of *diakonos*.

“Baptize” was created to define *baptidzo* in the same way. A generic word that could mean anything you wanted it to mean...

“Minister” then showed up innocently enough, but slowly evolved from “public servant”, which could mean anything from lowly government official to highly respected leader of a congregation. Like “deacon”, the word was used to convey the idea that God was formalizing the place of the church servant.

In our own day, more and more translators have changed from their original finding of “servant” as in the KJV and NKJV to “deacon” or even

“deaconess”. The source of their motivation is not anything textual. Rather, it is a cultural phenomenon among us. And it cries for correction.

There are several ways to approach that correction, and we must travel this road before we speak of Phoebe any further. First, there are other persons in Scripture referred to as *diakonos*. They were definitely not “deacons” in the church!

Peter is called the *diakonos* of the circumcision. Paul and Apollos are called *diakono*i who preached to the Corinthians. Timothy is a *diakonos*. And as we pointed out in chapter 15, Jesus Himself wears that title. These facts are all covered up by the translating of *diakonos* as “minister.”

How we can wish that the term had not changed. “Servant” is fine. Waiter. Attendant. A doer of menial tasks. Typical of Jesus’ own service to us. Obedient to death on a cross. Washing feet.

Anyone who serves the church is a servant of the church. No title is needed. No title but “servant” is given in Scripture. Now, there were men who served so regularly and so faithfully that the church singled them out as official servants, true. But these official servants, whom the church, in English culture, later called “deacons”, had specific qualifications that had to be met. Anyone could serve, but official servants had to be

- Reverent
- Not double tongued
- Not given to much wine
- Not greedy
- Of a pure conscience regarding Scripture
- Tested and found blameless
- The husband of one wife
- Rulers at home

Take a look, followers of Phoebe in today's church. I know you have worked hard for your position, but you simply do not qualify. And no, there is no separate list of qualifications there in Timothy for a woman.

The original seven "official" servants of the church were put in place (Acts 6) so that the apostles did not have to serve tables. That would become the job of the *diakono*.

No, they were not being put on a fast track for the elder board, though it might come to that for some of them. They did not form a board of their own and handle all the church's financial and business matters. Modern interpretations of *diakonos* whether Catholic or Protestant, have no basis in the early record of the church.

The servants, all of them, served in lowly ways, to free up the leaders to give themselves to prayer and the preaching of the Word. But one did not have to become "official" to serve the Lord in the church. It was assumed that Christ would give a servant-heart to all His disciples.

Said all of that to say, sadly for some, that Phoebe was merely, as the text says, a servant of the church. And she served the church

"in Cenchrea."

This was a seaport of Corinth, not far from where Paul was staying. A woman whose reputation for serving the Lord and for a high character had gotten Paul's attention. Whether she was on her way to Rome for other reasons, we are not told. But she willingly took upon her a responsibility that would one day be the source of blessing many multitudes of Christians the world over: the transmission of the epistle to the Romans.

For the record, Phoebe is mentioned only here. It is amazing what tales have been spun about her influence and authority. Nevertheless, she was important to Paul, so much so that he admonishes the Romans

16:2

“that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.”

Let me swim against the current a little while more. Does it not make sense to you, that if she were a serious church official she would not need all of Paul’s protective comments? She was simply a woman who served a church, as men and women have been serving the church for ages with no title, no salary, no hype. And because of that lack, Paul needed to tell the Romans that she was to be well cared for. After all, she was “in the Lord.” A sister, in the Lord. She’s one of us. Is there any greater recommendation?

The Romans are to behave around her in a manner befitting children of God. She is a sister, and a saint. You saints treat her that way. A holy woman being received by a holy church. Part of that reception would be

“and assist her in whatever business she has need of you...”

“Business” can mean just “matter” here. Help her in any way she needs help. But many have seen a little more in the word *pragmati*. The KJV is not the only version that hints that perhaps this woman had some business matters to tend to in Rome. Perhaps that was the reason she was going there to begin with. The church is being asked to help her do this first errand, as she had been so gracious as to carry out Paul’s work. Help her,

“for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.”

We can only speculate about all of this. A business woman, probably single, whose business interests profited the church? A woman therefore of means? Do whatever you can to bless this lady, for she has certainly blessed us.

Now Paul turns to the greeting section of this chapter, verses 3-16.

16:3

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”

With these folks we are a little more familiar. Paul had first met this couple in Corinth, per Acts 18:2-3. They had formerly been in Rome, but were forced to leave because of Claudius’s hatred of the Jews. Tentmakers by trade, as was Paul, the apostle joined with them, working and living side by side. They became fast friends.

Later in the same chapter of Acts, we see Paul bringing them along with him to Ephesus. We cannot be sure if they were simply relocating their business, or if they wanted to render support to their new friend. At any rate, when he left Ephesus, they stayed.

They would later return to Rome, when the persecution had passed. But not before they were able to take a certain Jew named Apollos aside and teach him the way of God a little more fully, making him an even more effective minister of the Gospel than he already was.

So Paul now greets them as they have returned to Rome to resume the flow of their lives.

16:4

“who risked their own necks for my life.”

This must have reference to their going with him from Corinth to Ephesus. In Corinth itself, Paul had found a lot of opposition, and whatever came to him came to his hosts, who would not even let him leave the city alone. They were sold out to Paul and His Master.

He is not finished with his praise,

“to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”

If they indeed had saved Paul’s life, maybe multiple times, it seems clear that Paul is saying that the existence of certain Gentile fellowships that he was called to begin, can be traced back to the protection that these dear friends afforded. No Paul, no church. Gentiles owed a huge debt to this family.

We should be encouraged by knowing that all the assisting work we do for the Gospel is just as important as work done by those on the front lines. Our offerings and prayers and actions on their behalf really matter!

One more thing:

16:5

“Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

Paul knew from experience if not from actual report, from living with them, that there were always going to be believers in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (also known as “Prisca”). That is who they were. So the elders of the church at Rome are to issue a special greeting to their house fellowship.

You will note that I mentioned “Aquila and Priscilla” in that order. Paul uses that order in 1 Corinthians 16:19, when he is sending back a letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. And Luke does the same in Acts 18:26. Timothy and the church of Rome, however, are told to greet them in reverse order. Luke’s other two mentions have the lady first also.

You ask, what does all that mean? I will tell you what it means. It means nothing at all.

Verse 5 goes on to mention another brother in the Lord,

“Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.”

Achaia, you will recall, is the southern portion of the Grecian peninsula, where Paul’s missionary work was so extensive. Epaenetus has the special place in Paul’s heart of being his first convert. What a joy this man must have been. How he got to Rome and became a part of the Roman church is unknown. This is his only mention in Scripture.

16:6

“Greet Mary, who labored much for us.”

This Mary is not to be placed alongside any other Scriptures about a “Mary” of which there are many. All we know is in this verse. A believer. A hard worker. Builder of God’s Kingdom.

16:7

“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen...”

Once again the inroads of feminism meet us in verse 7. Let’s go very slowly. First, neither of these two persons are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, leaving us again to speculation.

Next, about the name Junia (or is it Junias?). The translators are split down the line on this, depending on the Greek manuscript they followed. Interestingly, the Textus Receptus on which KJV is supposed to be based, has “Junias.” But the KJV itself does not. This is due to the fact that even the Receptus itself has variations.

So it is not possible, in my opinion, to tell whether Andronicus’s counterpart was his wife or another female relative, or a male relative. I say relative, because Paul claims them both as his own. Even if we

become relatively certain that “Junias” is the correct rendering, that name can be male or female.

“... and my fellow prisoners...”

When did these three share a common cell? We do not know. All we know is that Paul is greeting two Jewish relatives who somehow suffered with him on one or more of his many journeys.

Oh, and there is this other thing. The reason I am going so slowly here.

“who are of note among the apostles...”

And people will argue, 1. This means that both of these persons were apostles. Which makes their gender of utmost importance. Or 2. This means that the apostles of Christ considered these two, who were not apostles themselves, noteworthy.

The Greek can support either interpretation. The Greek might support either name. So how do we know if this “Junia”, a woman, is here being called an apostle?

The obvious answer is that this greeting is coming from the Apostle Paul. Is it likely that Paul would be greeting, commending, a woman who defied his ban on public authority and speaking in the church? For, to be an apostle, means to be in authority. Even the small “a” apostles took charge. They were authoritative. Women cannot do that. Logically, Junia was not an apostle or an Apostle.

Which means Junia is probably Junias, and that he and Andronicus did indeed stay in the same jail at the same time. And because of their heroic work in the Gospel, they had caught the attention of the apostles who ruled the church!

One last detail:

“who also were in Christ before me.”

Some of Paul’s own family, we now learn, had come to Christ ahead of him. This might explain further the kicking against the shepherd’s goad that Paul experienced during the time before his conversion. Was his family trying to reach out to him, as Jewish converts in all generations have tried to win their families to Christ? Paul was literally one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Tradition: Andronicus later became a bishop of the church.

16:8

“Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.”

Once more, no other mention of him in the Bible. Loved.

16:9

“Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ.”

Textus Receptus, Urbanus. KJV, Urbane. Nowhere else in Scripture. Not just Paul’s associate, but a valued team member.

“and Stachys, my beloved.”

Not mentioned elsewhere. As Amplias, just loved. We must meet these brothers one day! And how many others does the Father have through the centuries that are just loved?

Tradition: He was one of the “seventy” and later the bishop of Byzantium.

16:10

“Greet Apelles, approved in Christ.”

Not mentioned elsewhere. Approved. Same as in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Do diligence to show yourself approved...” Tested, tried. Sounds like this brother also went through the fire with Paul, and came out standing tall.

Tradition says that Apelles was one of the “seventy” and later became a bishop.

“Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.”

The word “household” does not appear in the Greek, but is supplied by most translators. Some have inserted “family.” Only mentioned in this chapter. And is it possible that Aristobulus himself was not a believer? Maybe even a son of Herod the Great? Paul then was simply reaching out to his family, that had supported Christ and His work.

Tradition represents him as a brother of Barnabas, says Unger.

16:11

“Greet Herodion, my countryman.”

Another relative of Paul. Yet the name implies a connection to the local king, Herod Agrippa II. Was a Jew actually married into the Herod family somehow?

Mentioned only here. Not to be confused with the “Herodians”, a political party, or “Herodias”, a granddaughter of Herod the Great.

“Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.”

The implication, from my viewpoint, is that there were members of Narcissus’ household that were not in the Lord. Those who showed up at

church when this letter was read would be greeted by the apostle.
Mentioned only here.

16:12

“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord.”

Women’s names. Perhaps they were sisters? Some suggest they were twins. Whoever they were, they impressed Paul as persons willing to put their shoulders to the plow and labor for the Gospel.

Mentioned only here. Where Paul met them, or any of this list, and how they came to be in Rome now, is anyone’s guess.

“Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.”

The tense is a bit different here. Past tense. Macarthur suggests that her work is past and she is being honored as a senior saint. Persis is a feminine name, perhaps of Persian origin. Mentioned only here.

Notice the apostle’s valuing of hard work for Christ!

16:13

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord,”

A “Rufus” is mentioned in Mark 15:21. The Gospel writer tells his audience that the man who helped Jesus carry His cross, Simon of Cyrene, had two sons, Alexander and Rufus. I believe the readers knew who he was talking about. Though this is not a positive identification, Paul could be calling him “chosen” in reference to the way his family was selected to enter into the sufferings of Christ.

“and his mother, and mine.”

The widow of Simon of Cyrene – and we assume her widowhood or Simon would have been mentioned – somehow cared for Paul as a mother would her own son, during one or more of his missionary journeys. Perhaps she helped bandage wounds or offer soft words of comfort that only a mother can give.

16:14

“Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.”

None of these names are elsewhere in Scripture. The scant tradition we have mentioning them tells us:

Phlegon was one of the seventy, and became the bishop of Marathon. Hermes was also one of the seventy, and was later the bishop of Dalmatia.

And, several church fathers want to connect Hermas to the extra-Biblical writing that bears his name. Problem is, that work did not show up until about 150 A.D. This greeting was sent a hundred years earlier!

Perhaps this group of men represents one of the many individual fellowships in the area of Rome, and Paul is giving a “shout-out” to the entire assembly. (Per Macarthur.)

16:15

“Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.”

If Macarthur is correct, here is another house church, a collection of believers in one of the Roman neighborhoods, which combined with all the others to make the one church of Rome.

Of this quintet, only Philologus shows up in any reputable tradition. He may have been one of the seventy, as so many on this list were, and later a bishop. We do not know if Julia was his wife or sister.

None of these persons are in the Bible elsewhere.

Finally,

16:16

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

Paul now wishes his greeting to be spread out among all. Imagine being in the assembly as this list was being read, and your name not being spoken! Paul could not probably include everyone he knew in Rome. So, greet everyone!

It had long been a tradition among the Jews and some Gentiles to show affection by a simple kiss. It is still the practice of many. There is no demand in Scripture for such a sign, but neither is it prohibited. Excesses in either direction are to be avoided, and we have all seen both, yes?

There is the cold church where no contact at all is visible. Hardly even a verbal greeting is expressed in some communities. This is unfortunate. On the other hand, there are those among us who would pervert the apostle’s invitation to affection. It is perhaps this tendency that has caused many to go the direction of coldness.

The “holy handshake” serves for some, with a quick hug for special people. Visitors can be turned off by no greeting, or excessive ones. Let each church approach this matter carefully. It can make a difference.

I think the word “holy” is key here. Keep it holy. Keep it loving. Most people will understand.

“The churches of Christ greet you.”

My home church was a division of the “restoration movement” known as the Christian Church or church of Christ. We loved this verse so much. We could point to it and and say, “See? We’re in the Bible.”

Of course, Paul had no such division in mind. He was in Corinth, recall. He had been ministering the Gospel and from the ministering of the Gospel comes the planting of a local church. Paul was able to speak for all those churches he had planted, and as an apostle, for all the churches that had come to life before his work. On their behalf he offered a huge “God bless you!” to the church of Rome.

And so the end is here again. Again Almost. Not quite. One more challenge. One more list of names. Three more “amen’s”.

16:17

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses...”

Still heavy on his heart is the problem of the unity of this Roman church. Ethnic and racial and religious and Scriptural divisions could rend the assembly, if God’s people did not take note. Some would even use Paul’s letter to do this. Paul had many enemies within the Body.

Some would accuse him of being against Moses. And get a following. Some would accuse him of being soft on sin. And get a following. Others would point to his liberal ways when dealing with the weaker brother issue. They too could get followers. And there were unbelievers and false teachers and... all that we have in the church today.

Paul says, Keep your notepad out. Write down the names of people you hear slandering the true leadership. Coming against the Gospel. Trying to go back to the law. Binding people’s consciences with unimportant

matters. Take that list to the leaders. Pray. Confront. Keep the unity of the Spirit at any cost.

“contrary to the doctrine which you learned”

Doctrine – teaching – was trashed in Paul’s day as it is in ours. But doctrine matters. What the apostles have taught us we must pass on without change to another generation. We must keep our eyes and ears open for the false ones among us,

“and avoid them.”

Avoid people who are divisive. They are not always easy to spot, but after a while they stand out vividly. They will try to bring up a subject of controversy in casual conversation. They will see which side you are on, and begin to share with you why you should not be on that side. They will disparage church leaders, some of whom you may have trusted for years. Avoid them. Report them.

Why?

16:18

“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Amazing how the wolves fool us at first. They may be eloquent. All they want is to stand up for the truth, they will tell you. But their motives are all wrong. They are not serving Christ at all,

“but their own belly...”

The more advanced church splitters wind up taking part of the flock somewhere else, and taking offerings. Money that should go into the church coffers now feed these evil men,

“and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

What is curious about this passage is that Paul has already ended his epistle. The doctrinal portion is finished. His personal plans have been laid out. Greetings all around. And now this. There is a pain in the apostle’s heart and he is constrained to return to the main path, the discourse on unity of Jew and Gentile, of strong and weak, of this race and that race. He does not want to see the church of Rome divided up into separate groups that war against one another.

What if he could see the city of Rome today, and the many expressions of what is called Christianity?

But finally, enough. A word of praise, one more exhortation, a promise, and a blessing.

16:19

“For your obedience has become known to all.”

Paul says, the word is out there. Your enemy knows that you have received the truth and obeyed it.

“Therefore I am glad on your behalf;”

The fact that the Romans have received the Word of God makes the apostle glad and sad. Glad because that is the aim of every teacher, to find people who will listen and do what they are taught. And sad. They are now a target, and a clever enemy will stalk them.

“but I want you to be wise in what is good and simple concerning evil.”

This message I have given you, hold on to it. That is true wisdom. The enemy will come to complicate things, and muddy the water. Don’t listen

to all the philosophies and arguments of men. Don't educate yourself in the ways of this world. Be like innocent and simple children, as Jesus taught us.

16:20

“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.”

Shortly. Soon. Or quickly. Words like this in reference to our final victory are often confusing to us. These words were spoken two thousand years ago. Satan is alive and well. There are other possible understandings:

In every individual battle we fight, we can expect victory over Satan. We are not losers from here to eternity. He has called us always to triumph in Christ.

This verse should be read in the light of the previous verses. Avoid and confront the false teachers. Be wise in good things, simple in evil. Keep doing that and the God of peace will crush Satan. Not the ultimate crushing, mind you, but a solid victory. Look for it. Not victory as you might have planned it, but victory nonetheless.

The Greek word translated “soon” or “shortly” can also be quickly, suddenly. As the very coming of Jesus will come “quickly”. Like lightning. Like a gathering of vultures over a dead body. You may wait a long time for that lightning blast, but when it comes, it comes quickly.

Or, we can try to look at time as God does, with one day as one thousand years. One day, looking back, it will indeed seem that this earthly existence was just a moment. He came soon. Satan was crushed in a relatively short time.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

So *there* we have it. An amen. The letter is finished.

No. That was just the first amen. Two more. One of them now comes from those gathered around Paul as he prepares to send this epistle via Phoebe to Rome. They want to be sure they are included in blessing the Romans with a greeting.

16:21

“Timothy, my fellow worker...”

Everyone knows Timothy. Two of Paul’s twenty-one letters were written to him. We call such letters pastoral epistles, but nowhere in Scripture is Timothy referred to as a pastor. The pastors were a plurality in the first church, and were the same as elders and bishops. Only later did the Roman-style pyramid form, with a man at the top.

Timothy’s highest calling is mentioned here, “fellow worker.” That’s what he did. He worked with Paul, carrying out assignments as Paul needed. One of those assignments was to take over temporarily the work begun in Ephesus. He was to do the work of the pastor while replacing himself with a team of pastors. Then he could return to Paul. Timothy, as well as Titus cannot be thought of as life-long “career” men in the local church. They were Paul’s assistants, first and foremost.

Timothy first shows up in Acts 16 while Paul is in Lystra. His father is Greek, his mother is Jewish. Seeing his gifts and zeal, Paul wants Timothy to come along on the next missionary journey.

We see him in Berea, Acts 17, where he is left behind with Silas temporarily, then asked to rejoin Paul at Athens. Somehow they are split up again, but back together in Corinth. It could well be that this is the time when Paul wrote to the Romans, Timothy sending this greeting.

Timothy then is sent away with Erastus to Macedonia (Acts 19) where Paul later meets him and the rest of the team, and travels into “Asia.” We

do not see Timothy in Acts after that, but he certainly shows up in Paul's epistles.

Paul sends Timothy to the Corinthians, the Philippians, and the Thessalonians, on various errands. And Timothy is present at the writing of not only Romans, but Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

Though he is a fellow worker and a brother, he is also referred to as a dear son of Paul in the faith and in the ministry.

And Hebrews 13:23 lets us know that this constant service earned him a place of persecution. He was imprisoned, but happily, says the writer of Hebrews, released.

So to limit Timothy to being "the pastor" of a local church in Ephesus, when in fact he was only there on assignment for a short time, is to mishandle the history of the New Testament. In spite of his timidity and his stomach problems, and parenting that may have resulted in persecution within the family, Timothy is one of the heroes of the New Testament.

"and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you."

These three are linked together in the Greek in such a way that they would all qualify as relatives of Paul, at least fellow-Jews. But the latter two only, could also be indicated.

Lucius is listed in Acts 13:1 as one of the prophets and/or teachers in the church of Antioch, who actually had a part in setting aside Paul and Barnabas (who were also teachers in that group) for the ministry. Now, with Barnabas having separated from Paul, Lucius joins the team, perhaps sent out to help heal the wound caused by the separation?

“Jason” may well be the man of Acts 17 who harbored Paul and Silas during their stay in Thessalonica. Jason’s house was ransacked in vain, and he himself dragged out of it, accusing him before the authorities of giving asylum to “those who have turned the world upside down.” More than that, treason was in the list of charges. They knew the Jesus Paul preached claimed to be a King. Jason was let off with a warning and a payment similar to “bail.” We are not sure when he joined the apostolic team, but here he is in Corinth greeting the church of Rome.

“Sosipater” does not appear in Scripture elsewhere, but one named “Sopater” does. Some speculate that this disciple who was on that team of men with Timothy in Macedonia and Asia (Acts 20:4) was indeed Sosipater.

Then, even Paul’s scribe is eager to join in the greeting:

16:22

“I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.”

We do not know how often Paul used this or any scribe. We hear of his vision problems. And we see in Galatians 6:11 how passion could drive him to write large letters with his own hand, in order to underscore a serious issue. Beyond that, all we know is that this, his most exquisite piece of work, was dictated to another.

16:23

“Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you.”

As His Lord, Paul did not have a place of his own to lay his head. He was totally dependent on the hospitality of brothers and sisters.

Gaius first appears in Acts 19:29, as he and another travel companion of Paul at the time, Aristarchus, are seized by an angry mob at Ephesus. The

story focuses on Paul after that and we never find out what happens to his two friends. But their appearance elsewhere is evidence that they were released safely enough.

Gaius is then mentioned in the next chapter of Acts in connection with that large team that moved through Macedonia and Asia with Paul and Timothy.

One distinction about this disciple is that he was one of only two people that Paul ever baptized. He realized early on that to be baptized by Paul could easily cause some to think that Paul was another John the Baptist or even Jesus. Even today some consider it an honor to be baptized by this or that preacher. Nonsense. We are baptized into Christ or not at all.

The elderly apostle John addresses his third epistle to one who must be quite advanced in years himself now, if it is the same Gaius as we have seen so far.

Meanwhile Gaius has become settled in Corinth, it would seem, and is offering his home to his former travel companion, remembering how difficult were those days on the road. Paul, or is it Gaius, lets us know that this man actually has the gift of hospitality to such an extent that he is forever offering it to the church there. Perhaps the church even meets in his home.

Some have claimed that the above four instances of the name actually refer to four different persons named "Gaius." There really is no clear way to know. It would seem to me that a different Gaius would have been referred to by a different name to avoid confusion.

"Erastus, the treasurer of the city, Greets you..."

In 2 Timothy, Paul informs his son in the faith that Erastus had stayed in Corinth. That is where we find him now. But in Acts 19:22, we see Paul

sending one named Erastus with Timothy on a missionary assignment. Is this latter Erastus now the treasurer of Corinth?

Macarthur says no. But Unger's Bible Dictionary gives an enthusiastic thumbs-up to the idea. The Gospel was so powerful as to convert even city officials. This one, like Matthew, gave up his post and followed Jesus by following Paul?

Chronologically, this Romans greeting from Corinth by Erastus would have come first. He is still treasurer but with Paul. Acts 19 would have been next, Erastus as missionary. 2 Timothy was Paul's last epistle and tells us of the leaving of many of Paul's closest friends. Some of the reasons were good. Others not.

Demas had fallen away. Crescens and Titus had gone. Tychicus he sent away. Trophimus is sick. Erastus "stayed in Corinth" his hometown. Did he desert?

As with Gaius, we'll not know the answer on this side.

"And Quartus, a brother."

In the Greek, Quartus is "the" brother. Macarthur points out with good reason that the way the text flows, there is a good chance that Quartus was the brother of the last-mentioned Erastus.

Not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.

16:24

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

The second, but not the last Amen. It seems to be coming from the chorus of folks that have just offered their greeting. Not wanting to say only

“Hello” they add the words that Paul is so fond of saying, and which he had just said four verses ago. A greeting that needs no comment, I think.

Paul now is ready to offer his final benediction, his last words, a prayer that is both emotional and eloquent, a fitting way to end his writings.

16:25

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel...”

The blessing of these three verses is to God. A short hymn of praise, yet in one of Paul’s characteristically long sentences – about seventy words in English. The summarized thought is merely “to Him... be glory.” But the description of “Him” is worthy of note!

He is the (only) one who can establish us. Make us stable. Firm. Able to stand. We seek crutches at times, but we would do better to lean on the only one who is standing us up.

How does He do it? Paul’s gospel. Paul does not imply that he has a gospel no one else has. He simply means the gospel that he has brought to the Romans and all other peoples on his journeys.

“and the preaching of Jesus Christ...”

How does one make a distinction between the gospel and the preaching of Jesus? Is not the gospel the good news about Jesus? Yet the “and” is certainly in the Greek and every translation recognizes its presence. Two entities here. The Gospel, and the preaching, or the proclamation, of the Gospel.

Paul talks elsewhere of the foolishness of the proclamation, or the thing proclaimed. There is a shade of difference between the existence of the facts about Jesus and the proclaiming of them. Paul says God is able to establish us both ways.

There is a third description of this saving establishing entity,

“according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began...”

This Gospel story, this proclaiming of it is here as a new revelation from heaven. God has known about it since the world began, but it was kept under wraps, only hinted at here and there. No one’s eyes were opened to this mystery for thousands of years. The “mystery of his will” is the phrase used by the apostle when writing to the Ephesians. In Colossians the mystery is “Christ in you.”

Similar thoughts to these are repeated further in Ephesians, in chapter 3. Paul reveals to the church that God has shared the mystery of the ages with him and the other apostles. In other ages it had not been revealed, at least not fully. The part of the mystery he references here is the fact that Gentiles would be fellow heirs with Jews. Unheard of! Unthinkable! He details more of the mystery in the rest of that chapter.

He revealed the mystery of the coming of Christ also, and more. Paul was truly a privileged individual. And he suffered much for it in this life.

16:26

“but now made manifest...”

As indicated in Ephesians and elsewhere, part of that manifestation is the Spirit’s direct revelations to Paul and the other apostles. It is these revelations that make up the foundation stones of the church, as the revelation to Peter that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God. Apostles were called forth for this very reason, to be a witness of all Jesus is and did, and to lay in place once and for all the message we are to preach. Let no modern so-called apostle add to or take away from what they established. They do it to their own peril.

So we are in the age of the new revelation, the new covenant, God's final call to mankind to obey His voice and be saved. Now that message needs to get out.

"and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations..."

In our easily deceived generation it is probably not wise to use the word "prophetic". There is an amazing array of things considered to be "prophetic" in the charismatic part of Christendom. I notice that the translators split half-half on using the phrase "prophetic Scriptures" and the equally valid idea of "Scriptures of the prophets." Most of the translators who would have used the former expression would not have had the modern idea in mind.

In short, Paul is talking about the prophets that any one of his readers would have recognized as the writers of the Old Testament books of prophecy. But why bring them in here? We have just established that the mystery was revealed to Paul and the other apostles. Yes, revealed to Paul but actually, if God's people had been able to see it, revealed by the prophets. And by those same prophets God will now speak to a new covenant audience for thousands of years more, from the first century to our own.

How many prophets have we quoted in the book of Romans itself? Paul uses the prophets in every letter to make his case about the mystery that has been revealed. Slowly but surely we see the plan of God unfold, and realize it is one plan after all.

"according to the commandment of the everlasting God..."

Our thoughts go back to that strange day in Athens. The apostle has been trying to speak the language of the men who gathered at Mars Hill every day to learn something new. Oh they learned a new thing this day. They learned that the God they ignorantly worshiped was their Creator. That

He expected them to seek Him. That He was willing to overlook their foolishness. But that He now commanded all men everywhere to repent. The Judge , who was raised from the dead by God, is coming.

The Gospel goes out. The story of Jesus. His life His miracles, His teachings, His death, His resurrection, His ascension. Yes, but also His call to repentance, without which none of this will profit anyone. The everlasting God is calling men in our generation, the last generation on earth from Pentecost until His coming, to repent. He is commanding that men be set aside

“for the obedience to the faith.”

The Gospel we preach must include this part. Look at all the Father has done for us through Jesus. Now believe and obey the Gospel. Paul speaks more than once of obeying the truth in Romans and Galatians. He promises a fiery vengeance on those who do not obey the Gospel in 2 Thessalonians 1:8.

So, a wonderful mystery. A wonderful Savior. A call to obey Him. All in this final blessing. This is the God to whom Paul is praying, whom Paul is praising.

“to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”

Does anyone need a comment on these words? The one who establishes you deserves all the glory and we give Him that glory through Jesus. Forever and ever.

Thus ends Paul’s finest written work. For two millennia it has touched and changed lives. May your own life be changed as you read again and again these precious words. Thank you for your attendance to these messages.

Bob Faulkner. November, 2019